CHAPTER-2

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF INDIAN SOCIETY

2.1 Hindu Way of Life:

Hinduism is surpassed only by Christianity and Islam in having the most number of adherents today. Hinduism has a very ancient tradition, and it is not possible to pinpoint an exact year when it began. Archeological evidence can be traced back to at least the third millennium B.C.E. for a culture living in the northern regions\(^1\) of the Indian subcontinent. The deities of the people in those regions were typically personifications of nature, and were hierarchically described. Their religious system was formed from a broad array of beliefs and practices. In fact, Hinduism is actually a family of religions, and its practices are widely varied. Etymologically, the word Hinduism refers to the Indian people, and references their diversity of beliefs. They appreciate the variety of beliefs making up the aggregate of Hinduism and believe that what is important is that individuals believe in something greater than what we can fathom, and that belief may or may not include the worship of a single supreme deity. For the Hindus that do believe, however, deity becomes manifest in many different forms. The three major Hindu deities are Brahmā, Shiva, and Vishnu. There are perhaps thousands of additional Hindu Gods and Goddesses each representing a different quality or characteristic.

The various gods are mentioned in ancient Hindu texts. One of those, a four-part compilation known as the Vedas are the scriptural texts that form the basis of Hinduism. The oldest Veda, the Rig-Veda, dates back to at least 1500 B.C.E. The other three Vedas are Sāma, Yajur, and Atharva. In the Vedic tradition, the Vedas themselves are not considered human compositions, but were rather received by shamans known as rishis. The Vedas weren’t actually written down until about the fifteenth century C.E., so their passing down by word of mouth for over three millennium is phenomenal indeed.

\(^1\) It is commonly believed to have developed primarily in the Indus River Basin, with concentrations in the towns of Mohenjo Daro and Harappā (Prebish 2).
The Upaniṣads, originally 14 in number, and dating from at least 800 B.C.E., were commentaries associated with the four Vedas. They comprise a string of philosophical sayings and insights into the nature of reality, and are the basis for the later Vedānta philosophy. They suggest that our ultimate destiny depends on finding out the truth about the world and ourselves. Not satisfied with the aphoristic wisdom of these sources, and interested in establishing a comprehensive world view, Hindu thinkers developed a number of philosophical systems or views (Klostermaier 230). Seen as a collective, these systems or views help illustrate the diversity of Hindu beliefs.

Six orthodox² views of the Vedas and Upanishads form the basis of the Hindu philosophy (Renard 89). Sāṃkhya is associated with discrimination and reason, and it describes all of reality.

Its purpose is to understand reality and its 25 categories of spirit and matter. It is believed that by fully understanding spirit and matter, true knowledge is achieved. As it developed, Sāṃkhya, which was idealistic in nature, became paired with the more practical Yóga system, and it was in the latter that a 26th category of reality was included—God. In the Yóga system, God, like the other 25 categories of reality, is a focus of meditation.

The third view forming the foundation of the Hindu philosophy is that of Mīmāṃśā. Its belief is that liberation cannot be gained by knowledge alone, and it has an elaborate system for interpreting the Vedas. Mīmāṃśā’s oldest form is referred to as Pūrvā Mīmāṃśā, and it has been traditionally paired with a later form known as Uttarā Mīmāṃśā. The focus of Pūrvā Mīmāṃśā is on ritual and worldly duties, whereas the focus of Uttarā Mīmāṃśā is on theoretical matters such as perception and causation (Jones and Ryan 289).

A fifth view of Hindu philosophy, Nyāya, is based on logic. It has sixteen logic-based categories that help correct erroneous thinking. Similar to Nyāya is Vaiśeṣika, which has six analytical categories with which to overcome difficulties in knowledge dealing with the dichotomy of spirit and matter. Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika have been interpreted and combined into a single philosophical system.

² “Orthodox” in this sense means that in these systems the Vedas have been accepted as the ultimate authority.
Hinduism is both a way of living and a structured social and religious system. Most Hindus don’t think of religious truth in dogmatic terms, because the very act of using words to describe something stops short of being able to truly grasp its essence. Truth transcends all verbal definitions (Zaehner 3). The core of Hinduism doesn’t depend on belief in deity, or on whether there is one deity or many. Instead of God, the concept of dhárma is at the center of belief for Hindus. It can be a difficult concept to fully understand but essentially comprises the essence of law and religion, both of which are based on the subtle natural law that governs all existence (i.e., both human and non-human existence). Dhárma has many different subtle meanings in different circumstances, but at the heart of dhárma is the sense of existing in a manner that is appropriate (Bowker 68). And part of acting appropriately is to humbly accept one’s status in life.

There are four distinct periods of development of Hinduism (Zaehner 6-9). The first period was one of polytheism, with the Rig-Veda being its main literary document. The second period was one represented by pantheistic monism, in which all are centered as one. From the pantheistic view, Brahmā (the creator god) reveals itself through the various subordinate divinities. In this phase, emphasis was placed on mokṣa, which is the freeing of the soul from time, space, and the limitations of matter.

The third period showed development within Hinduism of decided monotheistic trends. This is also the phase where the caste system became set as a social and cultural structure. The caste system was built upon the idea of the hierarchical system of deities from the prior period. In the fourth period there is a trend toward denial of individualism and more focus on the spiritual component of human life (viz., the soul). The soul is attached to the body, and the aim of self-realization is to break free of the confines of the body to realize the true self within. “In reality, it is the soul who desires, such as ‘I shall look,’ ‘I shall hear,’ and these desires are fulfilled through the crude external senses” (Rosen 173). But the soul also has a transcendental life beyond the physical body in relationship with the divine.

In descending order of caste status, the four classes are Brahmins (priests, scholars), Kṣatriyas (warrior-nobles, government workers), Vaiśyas (merchants, artisans, traders and producers), and Śúdras (workers and servants). Outside of these groups are the Dalits (outcasts or untouchables) (Noss 101).
“The soul has three manifestations which correspond to three sheaths of consciousness explained in Vedic literature: the physical body, the mind, and the true self within the physical body” (Rosen 173). It was during this fourth and current period that Mahātma Gandhi pointed out the unjustness of the caste system.

Rosen pointed out the three basic ideas that clarify Hinduism (169). They are the concept of identity (i.e., there is a soul that is distinct from the body), the teaching of kárma—that every thought, word and action has an ethical consequence, and belief in the transmigration of souls (a.k.a., reincarnation). All Hindu practice is set against the backdrop of these three basic ideas, and these three ideas are fundamental truths learned from the scriptures and traditions that form the basis of Hinduism.

Each of these three ideas operates in conjunction with the other two. The idea of the soul is better understood as the essence of the individual that goes through the various rebirths of reincarnation until the bondage of human suffering is broken. The idea of kárma is ingrained with the concept of the function of the soul, and there are numerous ways to understand kárma. “The Eastern law of kárma might be defined in various Western ways: scientifically as action and reaction, epistemologically as cause and effect, biblically and botanically as sowing and reaping, and even economically as supply and demand” (Braunstein 89). The idea of reincarnation operates with consideration of both the soul and kárma, and takes care of those whose thoughts and actions weren’t reconciled through the consequences of karma in the current life.

2.2. Religions and Culture Background :

Throughout the history of India, religion has been playing an important part of the country’s culture. The vast majority of Indians associate themselves with a religion, and religious tolerance is established in both law and custom. The sixth century B.C. is one of the cardinal epochs in human history. It was an age of extraordinary mental and spiritual unrest in several regions widely apart. In India ardent spirits were unusually active in quest of Truth. Ancient India had two
philosophical streams of thought, the Samaṇa religions and the Vedic religion, parallel traditions that have existed side by side for thousands of years. Both Buddhism and Jainism are continuations of Samaṇa traditions, while modern Hinduism is a continuation of the Vedic tradition. These co-existing traditions have been mutually influential. As the once-nomadic peoples who produced the PGW pottery settled into agrarian life in the Gangetic region, the religion they had originally practiced changed and adapted. Key concepts of Hinduism, such as reincarnation, actions (Karma), fate, duty (Dharma), and the four vaṇas classes‘ developed during this time. These new ideas were well adapted to agrarian or even urban settled life; they explained and justified the social and economic divisions of Gangetic society in terms of an individual’s good or bad conduct in former lives. Taking together these concepts created the basic worldview assumed by all indigenous religions in India.

The Vedic Hinduism or Brahmanism that developed out of the religion of the Rig-Veda in this period, 1000-400 B.C. was as different from modern Hinduism as the ancient Old Testament Hebrew religion was from today’s Christianity. Vedic Hinduism centered on rituals addressed to Vedic gods, performed by Brahman priests around a sacred fire. Some gods represented the natural elements—Agni, the fire; Surya, the sun; or Soma, the deified hallucinogenic plant used in rituals. Others had human characteristics or were associated with a moral or ethical principle: the god Indra was a mighty warrior, while Varuna stood for cosmic order, rita. In later Hinduism some of these Vedic gods: Indra, Agni, Surya, would become minor figures in the Hindu pantheon, while others, like Varuna, would disappear entirely. Gods barely mentioned in the Vedic text such as Vishnu would later assume much greater importance. Vedic fire rituals from the simplest to the most elaborate involved offerings of vegetable or meat foods or drink to the gods. In return the sponsor of the sacrifice might receive a powerful reign for a king or a good crop for a householder, a fruitful marriage, or a lifetime lasting a hundred years. Vedic rituals had no fixed place of worship—no temple, hall, or building was used—nor did they involve icons or images of the gods. The mode of worship was performance of sacrifices which
included the chanting of Rigvedic verses, singing of Samans and ‘mumbling’ of offering mantras ‘Yajus’. The priests executed rituals for the three upper classes Vana of Vedic society, strictly excluding the Sudras. People offered for abundance of rain, cattle, sons, long life and gaining ‘heaven’. Vedic religion evolved into the Hindu paths of Yoga and Vedanta, a religious path considering itself the ‘essence’ of the Vedas, interpreting the Vedic pantheon as a unitary view of the universe with ‘God’, Brahman seen as immanent and transcendent in the forms of Ishvara and Brahman. These post-Vedic systems of thought, along with later texts like Upanishads, epics namely Gita of Mahabharat, have been fully preserved and form the basis of modern Hinduism. The ritualistic traditions of Vedic religion are preserved in the conservative Śrauta tradition, in part with the exception of animal sacrifice, which was mostly abandoned by the higher castes by the end of the Vedic period, partly under the influence of the Buddhist and Jain religions, and their criticism of such practices.4

Several Samaṇa movements are known to have existed before the 6th century B.C.E. dating back to Indus valley civilization, where they peaked during the times of Mahavira and Buddha. Samaṇa adopted a path alternate to the Vedic rituals to achieve liberation, while renouncing household life. They typically engaged in three types of activities: austerities, meditation, and associated theories or views. As spiritual authorities, at times Samaṇa were at variance with traditional Brahmin authority, and they often recruited members from Brahmin communities themselves, such as Cānakya and Sāriputra.5 Traditionally, a Samaṇa is one who has renounced the world and leads an ascetic life of austerity for the purpose of spiritual development and liberation. According to typical Samaṇa worldviews, a human being is responsible for their own deeds and will reap the fruits of those deeds for good or ill. Liberation, therefore, may be achieved by anybody irrespective of caste, creed, color or culture in contradistinction to certain

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4 The Four Noble Truths are (1) The Noble Truth of Suffering, (2) The Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering, (3) The Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering, and (4) The Noble Truth of the Path (Noss 179).

5 The elements of the Noble Eightfold Path are (1) right understanding, (2) right aspiration, (3) right speech, (4) right conduct, (5) right livelihood, (6) right effort, (7) right mindfulness, and (8) right concentration.
historical caste-based traditions providing the necessary effort is made. The cycle of rebirth, Saṃsāra, to which every individual is subject, is viewed as the cause and substratum of misery. The goal of every person is to evolve a way to escape from the cycle of rebirth but samanīc traditions dispense with the rites and rituals of popular religion as factors in the attainment of emancipation and emphasize instead the paramount importance of ascetic endeavor and personal conduct.

Mahāvīra and Gautama Buddha were leaders of their Samaṇa orders. According to Jain literature and the Buddhist Pāḷi Canon, there were also some other Samaṇa leaders at that time. Thus, in Mahāparinibbāna Sutta a Samana named Subhadda mentions: —The leaders in religious life who are heads of companies of disciples and students, teachers of students, well known, renowned, founders of schools of doctrines, esteemed as good men by the multitude—to wit, Purāna Kassapa, Makkhali of the cattle-pen, Ajita of the garment of hair, Kaccāyana of the Pakudha tree, Sañjaya the son of the Belatthi slave girl, and Nigaṭṭha of Nātha clan.” The fullest exposition of Samaṇa leaders’ views is to be found in an early discourse entitled —Sāmaññaphala Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya. Samaṇas held a pessimistic world view of Saṃsāra as full of suffering or Dukkha. They believed in Ahimsa and rigorous ascetic practices. They believed in Kamma and Mokkha and viewed rebirth as undesirable. As opposed to Samaṇas, Vedics held an optimistic world view of the richness in worldly life. They believed in efficacy of rituals and sacrifices, performed by a privileged group of people, who could improve their life by pleasing certain Gods. The samanic ideal of mendicancy and renunciation, that the worldly life was full of suffering and that emancipation required giving up of desires and withdrawal into a lonely and contemplative life, was in stark contrast with the Brahminical ideal of an active and ritually punctuated life. Traditional Vedic belief held that a man is born with an obligation to study the Vedas, to procreate and rear male offspring and perform sacrifices. Only in his later life he may meditate on the mysteries of life. The idea of devoting one’s whole life to mendicancy seemed to disparage the whole process of social life and obligations.
2.3. Historical Background of Political Situation:

The political structure of the ancient Indian appears to have started with semi-nomadic tribal units called Jana. Early Vedic texts attest several Janas or tribes of the Aryans, living in semi-nomadic tribal state, fighting among themselves and with other Non-Aryan tribes for cows, sheep and green pastures. These early Vedic Janas later coalesced into Janapadas of the Epic Age. The term —Janapada literally means the foothold of a tribe. The fact that Janapada is derived from Jana points to an early stage of land-taking by the Jana tribe for a settled way of life. This process of first settlement on land had completed its final stage prior to the time of Buddha. The Pre-Buddhist North-west region of Indian sub-continent was divided into several Janapadas demarcated from each other by boundaries. Each of these Janapadas was named after the Khattiya tribe or the Khattiya Jana who had settled there-in.

Ancient Buddhist texts make frequent reference to sixteen great kingdoms and republics which had evolved and flourished in the northern, north-western parts of the Indian subcontinent prior to the rise of Buddhism in India. Aṅguttara-Nikāya, at several places, gives a list of sixteen great nations: Kāsi, Kosala, Aṅga, Magadha, Vajjī, Malla, Cheti, Vaṅga, Kuru, Pañcāla, Maccha, Sūrasena, Assaka, Avanti, Gandhāra and Kamboja. Another Buddhist text Dīgha Nikāya mentions only first twelve Mahājanapadas and omits the last four in the above list.

Indian history assumes a more or less definite shape towards the close of the seventh century B.C. There was no paramount power in Northern India at this period, but the whole country was divided into a number of independent States. Some of the States were monarchical, but other had republican or oligarchic constitution. Though monarchy was usual in ancient India, tribal states also existed, which were governed by oligarchies. The term —republic is often used for these bodies, and though it has been criticized by some authorities, it is quite legitimate if it is remembered that the tribes were not governed like the Republic of India by an assembly elected by universal suffrage. The four important royal dynasties that stand out prominently at this period are the Haryankas in Magadha,
the Aikshvākus in Kosala, the Pauravas in Vatsa (Kosambi), and the Pradyotatas in Avanti. It is interesting to note that the kingdom of Kuru-Pañchala, Kāsi and Matsya, celebrated in the Mahābhārata, continued at this period, although they ranked as minor powers. Of the non-monarchical States Vijjis of Mitthilā, the Sakyas of Kapilavatthu, and the Mallas of Pāvā and Kusinagara were mostly prominent. The Vajjis formed a confederacy of eight different clans, the most prominent of which were the Lichhavis, who had their capital at Vesāli. There were, besides these states, a number of democratic or autonomous clans such as the Bhaggas of Suñsumagiri, the Bulis of Allakappa, the Kālāmas of Kesaputta, the koliyas of Rāmagāma and the Moriyas of Pipphalivana. No one of these was of much political importance. And the tendency towards the gradual absorption of these domains, and also of the republics, into the neighboring kingdoms was already in full force. There were several other names of tribes of which it is not yet known whether they were clans or under monarchical government. These territories whether confederacies, kingdoms or empires, were typically controlled by local rulers or rajas and by laws and officials to different degrees. There are very early mentions of dynastic succession, as also of courts, councils and advisers. Their capitals were fortified cities, often located along strategic trade routes, surrounded by the agricultural villages and towns they controlled. Five out of the six largest cities in the Gangetic region in this period were the political capitals of such —great-clan territories. Political life in the Gangetic region, however, was just as volatile and competitive as religious life.

There were matrimonial alliances between many of these States, but that did not prevent the outbreak of hostility among them. Each of the four important royal dynasties, mentioned above, tired to establish its supremacy, and aggrandize itself at the cost of minor States. For example, Pajjota, King of Avanti, fought with Udaya, king of Kosambi, although the latter was his son-in-law, and at another time he threatened Rājagaha, the capital of Magadha. Pasenadī, king of Kosala, was already master of Kāsi, and his son afterwards conquered the Sakya State of Kapilavastu. Again Bimbisāra, king of Magadha, annexed Anga, and his son Ajātasattu conquered the Lichhavis of Vesāli. All these kings—Pajjota,
Udaya, Bimbisāra and Pasenadī—flourished in the second half of the sixth century B.C. At the beginning of the fifth century B.C. the Pauravas and the Pajjota seems to have retired from the contest for supremacy, which was thus left to be fought out between the Haryankas of Magadha and Aikshvākus of Kosala. A fierce and protracted struggle ensured between Pasenadī and Ajātasattu, and although the results were indecisive for a long time, victory ultimately inclined to the Magadha Kingdom. Henceforth Magadha stands out as the supreme power in Northern India, a position which was ultimately destined to convert her into the greatest empire that India had ever seen.

2.4. Historical Background of Economical Situation:

Even though there has been as yet no attempt to reconstruct a picture of the economic conditions any period in the early history of India, Pinaka and other Pāli works furnish interesting information on the economic condition of India at the time of the rise of Buddhism. As at present, the bulk of the people then lived in villages. The population of a village was concentrated within a relatively small area, as the dwelling were all clustered together to ensure safety. Around the villages there were arable fields divided into plots by channels for water or marked by a common fence. The holdings were usually small, but larger ones were not altogether unknown. The village folk had common rights over the adjacent forest and the grazing grounds, where the cattle belonging to various householders were sent under the charge of a collectively hired herdsman. The rural economy was based on what may be called peasant proprietorship. But no owner could sell or mortgage his part of the land without the consent of the village council. He cultivated the fields himself, but often employed laborers or slaves for the purpose. There were no big estates or landlords. The king received the tithes and his share, varying from one-sixth to a twelfth, of the produce in kind through the headman. The latter was an important person in the village. He carried on there the business of the government. At that time he was probably either a hereditary officer or was elected by the village council, which also helped him in maintaining local peace and security. The village residents were endowed with a
sturdy civic spirit. They united of themselves in such undertakings as laying irrigation channels, building mote-halls, rest-houses, etc. The women extended their full co-operation in these works of public utility. On the whole, each village was self-sufficient, and life was simple and unsophisticated. There were few rich men and paupers. Crime was rare, but people sometimes suffered greatly from famines occasioned by droughts or floods.

The main industry of the people was agriculture. Besides, they had made considerable progress in such crafts as wood-work including cart making and ship-building, architecture, leather-dressing, pottery, garland making, weaving, ivory-work, confectionery, jewelry, and work in precious metals. There were other occupations, e.g., tanning, fishing, hunting, dancing, acting, snake-charming, rush-weaving, etc., to which was attached a social stigma. In the view of the King there were the best examples of such crafts: elephant-riders, cavalry, charioteers, archers, army folk, slaves, cooks, barbers, bath-attendants, confectioners, garlandmakers, washer-men, weavers, basket-makers, potters, clerks and accountants. These are just the sort of people employed about a camp or a palace. Besides the peasantry and the handicraftsmen there were merchants who conveyed their goods either up and down the great rivers or along the coasts in boats or right across country in carts travelling in caravans. Silks, muslins, the finer sorts of cloth and cutlery and armor, brocades, embroieryes and rugs, perfumes and drugs, ivory and ivory work, jewelry and gold and silver—these were the main articles in which the merchant dealt. The older system of traffic by barter had entirely passed away never to return. The later system of a currency of standard and token coins issued and regulated by government authority had not yet arisen. Transactions were carried on, values estimated, and bargains struck in terms of the Kahāpaṇa, a square copper coin weighing about 146 grains, and guaranteed as to weight and fineness by punch-marks made by private individuals. Besides the coins, there was a very considerable use of instruments of credit. The great merchants in the few large towns gave letters of credit on one another. There were no banking facilities. Money was hoarded either in the house, or buried in jars in the ground, or deposited with a friend, a written record of the
transaction being kept. The number of those who could be considered wealthy from the standards of those times was very limited. There was a score of monarchs, whose wealth consisted mainly of the land tax, supplemented by other dues and perquisites; of a considerable number of wealthy nobles, and some priests, to whom grants had been made of the tithe arising out of certain parishes or counties or who had inherited similar rights from their forefathers; of about a dozen millionaire merchants in Taxila, Sāvatthi, Benares, Rājagaha, Vesāli, Kosambi, and the seaports, and of a considerable number of lesser merchants and middlemen, all in the few towns. But these were the exceptions. There were no landlords. And the great mass of the people were well-to-do peasantry, or handicrafts-men, mostly with land of their own, both classes ruled over by local headmen of their own selection.

As well as the state, another element did much to control prices and standard of work. This was the guild, a form of industrial and mercantile organization which played a big part in the economy of ancient India. There are faint and uncertain references to some sort of guild organization even in Vedic literature, but the time of the composition of the Buddhist scriptures guilds certainly existed in every important Indian town, and embraced almost all trades and industries. The guild united both the craftsmen’s co-operatives and the individual workmen of a given trade into a single corporate body. It fixed rules of work and wages, and standards and prices for the commodities in which its members dealt, and its regulations had the force of law, and were upheld by the king and government. The guild was headed by a chief, usually called the —Elder who was assisted by a small council of senior members. The office of Elder was usually hereditary and held by one of the richest members of the guild. In the Pāli scriptures the Elders is invariably described as a very wealthy man, often with much influence at the palace, and counseling the king himself. These and other emblems were sometimes granted by royal charter, and were carried in local religious processions by the guild-men. Some guilds had their own militias, which served as auxiliaries of the king’s armies in time of need. The guild had power not only over the economic, but also over the social life of its members.
In the oldest Pāli books there are accounts of the journeys of the wandering teachers and especially for longer journeys, they will generally have followed already established routes, this is incidental evidence of such as were then in use by traders. Later on, these routes actually followed by merchants, either on boats, or with their caravans of bullock carts. The roads were dangerous to the merchant-caravans. Many of the trade routes linking centers of civilization passed through dense jungle and over hills where wild tribes dwelt. There were whole villages of professional robbers, ready at all times to waylay the merchant. In these circumstances merchants preferred to share their perils together as many as five hundreds men travelling in caravan. Pāli literature tells of band of professional caravan guards, who would undertake to give guidance and safe conduct over a specified route, and who seem to have been a regular feature of the caravan trade, at least where the merchant corporations did not provide their own guards. Along with the family-run business and individually owned business enterprises, ancient India possessed a number of other forms of engaging in business or collective activity, including the economic organizations of merchants, craftspeople and artisans, and perhaps even military entities. The use of such entities in ancient India was widespread including virtually every kind of business, political and municipal activity. The period of 600 B.C. was marked by intensive trade activity and urban development.

2.5. The Buddhist View of Life and Descriptions of Buddhist Traditions:

The Hindu way of life had already been in existence for many centuries when Gautama Siddhartha, the historical Buddha, was born. Buddhism arose in India in a climate that was active with philosophical and religious speculation. A dominant tradition was concerned with how to overcome the continuous cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Many serious individuals tried to realize the ideal of ascetic dualism—achieving a high mental state through mastery of the body.

Many teachers, ascetics and philosophical thinkers appeared who claimed to be able to show the way to enlightenment. Two individuals stood out above the rest and left religious legacies that are still practiced today. One of them,
Vardhamana (c. 599–527 B.C.E.) was the founder of Jainism. The other individual was Gautama Siddhartha (c. 563–483 B.C.E.), the son of King Śuddhodana and Queen Māyā of the Śākya tribe of the Gautama clan. Both Jains and Buddhists criticized the traditional Hindu views of the understanding of God, along with the existing sacrificial system. They also rejected the idea that the Vedas were the ultimate authority. Buddha overcame the dualism of previous philosophies (i.e., those that described humans in terms of a separation of matter and spirit). He followed in the tradition of the Sāṃkhya philosophy wherein misery and evil were overcome by the seeking of salvation through detachment and enlightenment. Buddha denounced various religious superstitions, including those involving blood sacrifices, which he considered to be cruel and absolutely unnecessary (Carus). Buddha’s idea of enlightenment was that it could be acquired while occupying a middle ground between self indulgence and extreme asceticism. He saw enlightenment as a lively activity, and a process of contemplative and purifying thought. Like ascetics before him, he had fasted, but felt that during such periods of denial the mind as well as the body was deprived. He had been so disciplined as a novice that it was reported that he ate only a single grain of rice at meal times, but eventually realized that denying the body served no practicable purpose (Corlett and Moore).

Buddha saw the issue of man’s problems as a moral problem. Our problems were rooted in the selfishness of focusing on our desires. He believed that if desire itself was banished, then humans would proceed along a righteous path in life. Until his own enlightenment, Buddha knew that he had spent much of his life pursuing that which would inevitably pass away. He eventually realized that he could not continue to rely on fleeting activities and desires for his happiness. Once he had awakened through enlightenment in his own life with the wisdom to abandon the selfish interests of his formerly princely life, he was content to enjoy the inner peaceful life of non-attachment (i.e., non-attachment to both material things and to delusional ideas).
The essence of Buddha’s teachings can be summed up in two principles: the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. The four noble truths deal with doctrine, the focus being on understanding. The eightfold path deals with discipline and its focus is on practice. These two main principles lock together to become a mix of both doctrine and path.

2.5.1. The Ten Worlds Life’s Unlimited Potential:
Life and Death As an Integrated Whole:

Buddhism describes the experience of living in a unique way. In the Western world there is a tendency to consider the spiritual and physical aspects of life as separate, usually placing the value of the spiritual above that of the physical. This dualistic attitude toward the mind and the body extends to the natural world, which is regarded as something we can reduce to its separate components. The presumption that humans can “engineer” and even “improve” the way nature works is shortsighted and perilous, for all life forms are interconnected and interdependent. At the same time, our understandings of the subtle workings of the human mind and spirituality have also suffered from science’s insistence on an extremely narrow form of empirical evidence. Things that were once considered “matters of the heart” are redefined in the clinical language of psychological theories, which sometimes take a similarly limited view of human life.

Even some of the interpretations of the Western world’s philosophical traditions see human life as sharply divided between the imperfect, even defiled physical world, and the ethereal, pure world of the spirit. The soul tends to be considered as a separate entity from the body, freed from its grip in death. This duality extends to the way we view ourselves as separate from others and from our environment, to the point of seeing ourselves as either the masters of other life forms or as an insignificant speck in the universe. Such a sense of isolation can lead us to feel that we must compete with others in order to gain what we need to survive, even if our gains are made at the expense of others. Life and death are generally regarded as distinct opposites, so we cling to life for fear of death. We can thus identify two great fears that underlie almost all others—the fear of being alone and the fear of death.
In contrast, Buddhism views life and death as an integrated whole, which appears to be two but is in reality one. This concept is known as “dependent origination.” Essentially, it means that one aspect of life cannot exist without the other. Without the physical aspect, the spiritual aspect cannot exist, and vice versa. Life and death, happiness and suffering, enlightenment and delusion—all coexist throughout time and space and are inherent in everything.

Following is a brief description of each of the Ten Worlds:

1. The World of Hell is a state of suffering and despair, when a person feels trapped and is unable to see beyond a prison of pain and hopelessness. This feeling of being powerless finds expression in hopeless depression or uncontrollable rage, leading to destructive behaviour toward oneself and/or others.

2. The World of Heavenly Beings, or rapture, describes the experience of joy or elation when a heartfelt desire is fulfilled or a happy circumstance occurs. Although this state is euphoric, it is easily upset when circumstances change or when a baser impulse sends us into one of the lower worlds. For example, if a person were to suddenly become wealthy or famous, certain kinds of desires might present themselves that were formerly out of the question, and which might compromise our integrity or our sense of purpose.

The worlds from hell to heavenly beings are called the six paths. They describe a way of life that is essentially reactive—always being swayed by whatever life throws up at us. Living this way becomes a kind of vicious circle, and we find we are always at the mercy of changing circumstances; and yet it describes, perhaps more often than we might realize, the way we tend to live a great deal of the time.

The four noble worlds describe a way of life that is the result of self-reflection and the resolve to improve one’s life. This implies the development of resilience to the changing tides of impermanence, and the forging of one’s character through diligent effort. Each successive world represents an increasingly complete picture of what it means to be human.
We shall discuss detail the Buddhism concept of Heaven and Hell in the Chapter-4.

3. The World of Hungry Spirits describes the state of being enslaved by selfish desires or cravings, which are a primitive way of attempting to escape suffering. Lacking in self-awareness, one thrashes about desperately without any sense of purpose but that of satisfying whatever desire is most pressing at the moment.

4. The World of Animals is like the so-called “reptilian brain,” the instinct of self-preservation at all costs and without regard for others. There is a sense of purpose, but it is the self-centred aim of survival of the fittest. A person in this state will try to dominate those who are weaker, but will cower before those who are stronger.

5. The World of Asuras refers to asuras, demons in Indian mythology who typify the perverse desire to control others and to be seen as superior. Although self-awareness is more developed, it is warped by an egoistic desire for power for its own sake (as opposed to the state of animality, where selfish power is simply exerted for the sake of getting what one wants). For example, animals will overpower or kill other animals for food, self-protection, or to preserve their territory. Humans, on the other hand, will abuse or sometimes even kill others for pleasure. This is of course the most extreme expression of this life condition. These four worlds are called the four lower worlds—for obvious reasons. The first three—hell, hunger and animality—correspond to the three poisons of anger, greed and foolishness, or ignorance. We see the three poisons expressed throughout human history in the form of war, poverty and the results of shortsighted selfishness, such as pollution and certain types of diseases. All four of these are negative states, and they are always lurking just below the surface of our consciousness, waiting to spring forward if we let them. Being at the mercy of these lower states of life leads to suffering, for ourselves and for others.

6. The World of Human Beings, also described as tranquility, is a state of being calm and undisturbed. It is located in the middle of the Ten Worlds, between the four lower worlds and the four higher states, called the four noble worlds. From
this state, we are able to reflect and make choices about improving our lives. However, we are still susceptible to the lower worlds if this tranquillity is disturbed.

7. The World of Voice-Hearers, or learning, refers to Shakyamuni Buddha’s disciples, who wish to learn the truth of life and aspire to that truth. When applied to ourselves, this world represents the point at which we make such a decision. It is in general the desire for education and self improvement, for which we naturally turn to teachers whom we feel we can learn from.

8. The World of Cause-Awakened Ones, or realization, describes the acquiring of awareness through direct experience with nature, perceiving the law of cause and effect at work in all phenomena.

   Although people in these two worlds, called the two vehicles, attain a higher degree of self-development, they also tend to become self-satisfied and arrogant, regarding their achievements as the ultimate definition of their humanity. Shakyamuni warned his disciples not to become attached to the two vehicles, lest they become self-centered and attached to partial truths.

9. The World of Bodhisattvas is the awakening of the aspiration for the enlightenment of all living beings. A bodhisattava recognizes the interrelationship of all people and thus, the need for every person to achieve happiness. One’s devotion to practice equally for self and for others is the key to entering the state of Buddhahood.

10. The World of Buddhas describes those who achieve the supreme state of life, characterized by boundless wisdom and compassion. In this state one is fully awakened to the eternal and ultimate truth that is the reality of all things. The door has been totally opened to this wisdom; but it is anything but a static or fixed state. Once the portal to Buddhahood has been opened, one’s life continues to expand endlessly. This is the true, original state of a human being in perfect harmony with the eternal life of the universe. It is such a powerful experience that the Buddha said even he could not adequately describe it. The life condition of Buddhahood might sound like something so profound that it must be nearly
impossible to achieve. But this is not the case. Nichiren Daishonin explains that Buddhahood is as close as our own eyelashes, but we are unaware of it and unable to see it.

The Ten Worlds are always within our lives, and we can experience any of them at any time, depending on whether one or another of them is stimulated. Bringing out our enlightened state does not mean “climbing the ladder” of the Ten Worlds. It is more like turning on the lights in a dark room. Even in the depths of misery in the state of hell, chanting Nam-myoho-rengyokyo revitalizes us and enables us to immediately transform anguish into great joy and wisdom. In Buddhism this is called “changing poison into medicine.” At first this joyful state may only surface as brief glimpses. But even the tiniest flicker of hope is like a single spark that can ignite a bright and powerful flame, illuminating a cave that has been dark for thousands of years. Our problems, as well as our desires and dreams, are the fuel for lighting this flame within ourselves. Of course, total transformation takes consistent effort over the course of our lives; but the “enlightening” effect of chanting Nam-myoho-rengyokyo is immediate and can be felt in an upsurge of positive energy, a clearing of the mind, and a feeling of deep inner peace. “Faith” in this sense means two things: allowing this energy to flow freely without resisting, and patient, steady effort.

2.5.2. Destiny and Human Consciousness:
Karma and Rebirth:

Central to all major world religions is the idea of eternal life. In some traditions, the spiritual essence, or “soul,” lives on forever after the death of the physical body. Buddhism views life as a continual process, in which all life forms, including the planets and stars, undergo the cycle of birth, growth, aging and death. Existence and non-existence are seen as two inseparable aspects of eternal life. Two fundamental Buddhist concepts, known as “non-substantiality” and “dependent origination,” explain the apparently separate phenomena of life and death. Dependent origination states that, because phenomena arise and continue to exist only by virtue of their relationship with other phenomena, they have no fixed
substance and in their true state are called “non-substantial.” The unifying Buddhist principle known as the Middle Way clarifies that life is neither existence nor non-existence. All life forms are composed of a temporary union of the five components of life: form, perception, conception, volition and consciousness. Our lives come into being in our present existence possessing these five components; in other words, we are composed of our physical bodies (form) and our minds, which have the capacity to perceive, conceive, act, and be conscious of our existence. At the time of death, this temporary union dissolves into the life of the universe and becomes a latent potentiality. A Buddha is one who perceives the oneness of spirit and matter and life and its environment and is able to tap the universal consciousness of life as dependent origination: Because this exists, so does that. The temporary existence is thus united and contains the eternal existence, and vice versa.

Daisaku Ikeda explains as follows: To explain simply, it is generally thought that life begins with birth and ends with death. However, Nichiren Daishonin taught that life is eternal, spanning past, present and future with neither beginning nor end. Birth and death are the two inherent phases, which one’s eternal life repeatedly manifests. With respect to the concept of eternal life in Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, the Ongi Kuden [Orally Transmitted Teachings] states, “We repeat the cycle of birth and death secure upon the soil of our intrinsic enlightened nature.” It also states, “Our birth and death are not the birth and death that we experience for the first time, but the birth and death that are forever inherent in life” (Gosho Zenshu, p. 724).

The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life also states, “Myo represents death, and ho, life.” To briefly explain, the workings of birth and death, which are eternally inherent in life, manifest the Mystic Law as their true entity. When an individual life manifests itself in concrete form, that is called “birth,” and when it dissolves back into a latent, invisible state, it is called “death”… Also, Dengyo [a renowned Buddhist scholar] states, “Birth and death are the mysterious workings of the life essence.”
Again, in simple terms, that which activates and moves the individual life is called *myo*, the life essence. When an individual life becomes completely exhausted, it enters the state of death in order to rest and be restored. The *Ongi Kuden* states, “‘To depart’ means to open out into the universe.” As this passage indicates, “departure,” or death, is itself a merging of the individual life into the great cosmic life. Then, by virtue of *myo*, the essential power or life force of the cosmos, it is recharged, so to speak, and born into the world anew. The interval of latency is called “death.” (*Buddhism and the Cosmos*, pp.209–210)

The Lotus Sutra teaches that the essential nature of the universe is the continuous creation and enhancement of life—that the basic tendency of the universe is to continue the cycle of birth, growth, aging and death, to be followed by rebirth and the eternal regeneration of the process. Science indicates that life is formed from energy, which manifests itself as matter and consciousness—what we call life, as well as its environment. The principle in physics known as the law of the conservation of energy further teaches that energy cannot be created or destroyed, which can be interpreted to mean that life is both eternal and unlimited. Energy as life takes endless forms, and each of these life forms acquires a certain direction, through actions and interactions with other life forms, in accord with the law of cause and effect. This Buddhist principle is known as karma, which literally means “action.” We can think of our present life as one chapter in an ongoing story. The circumstances into which we were born, including the time and place, our family relationships, and our physical and psychological characteristics—all are the results of accumulated causes formed in the past, including our previous lives. What we think of as destiny is the karmic tendencies we have developed from the past. Some of these tendencies can be changed through our efforts to improve ourselves, but others are more deeply ingrained and are fixed, such as our physical characteristics and the realities of our background. However, there are many important aspects of our karmic tendencies that can be changed, if a sufficiently powerful force can be exerted upon them.
The law of karma is the law of cause and effect. Good causes produce good effects and bad causes produce negative effects. Buddhism teaches that no event or phenomenon is exempt from the law of cause and effect. Therefore, nothing “just happens” without a reason. However, it is very difficult to trace the cause for a particular effect, since we are making causes at every moment without being aware of their possible effects. In addition, we are unable to recall the innumerable causes we have made over the course of countless lifetimes.

Because of these two facts, many events or circumstances in our lives seem random or irrational.

But Buddhism is a practical philosophy, focused on how we live our lives here and now to create a better future. More important than being able to analyze the causes of our karma is developing the power to overcome the negative aspects of our karma and create good karma. It must be pointed out here that what constitutes good or bad karma depends on what we decide to do about our circumstances. For example, suppose a person is born poor or with a disability. As a result of such a hardship an individual might become a person of compassion and strength of character, able to help many other people.

On the other hand, another person who is born into the same circumstances might instead react with anger and resentment, turning to a life of crime or living in misery. Conversely, a person might be born into wealth, with good looks and health, and become arrogant and self-centered, leading a life that takes advantage of others. Can we then say that one person’s karma is inherently good or bad, based only on superficial circumstances? Obviously, it is only natural to desire good circumstances; but in the long run, the real measure of one’s life does not rest with things like how much wealth one has accumulated, especially given the fact that none of the things we acquire in this life can travel with us into the next one. Our only true possession is our condition of life, which can neither be taken away from us nor be given to us by someone else. Therefore, when we speak of changing our karma, we should understand this from the much broader perspective of the totality of our lives, and in relation to what we have achieved and what kind of person we have become. Nonetheless, suffering, no matter what
form it takes, is a reality; and the Buddha’s intent was to enable people to overcome their sufferings. Those who practise Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism have experienced the most remarkable transformations of their lives, both spiritually and in demonstrable ways in their circumstances. The important point is that the changes in their circumstances stem from the deep changes that take place within, in the expansion of each person’s humanity. These inner changes are accomplished by facing the realities of karma and challenging them, and by struggling with the negative forces that give rise to them. In this sense, the negative aspects of our karma become the incentive for us to develop our inner lives, and therefore ultimately come to have value in the process of our “human revolution.”

2.5.3. Marriage in Buddhism:

Marriage in Buddhism is considered to be a social convention and mostly a personal and individual choice, not a duty of religion. The Discourses advise on maintaining a happy and pleasant marriage. Remaining faithful with the partner and monogamy, which means having a single spouse is encouraged. Similar is the thought of Hinduism with regard to marriage. Man can marry a single woman even though mythological kings often married more than one woman.

2.5.4. Yagnas in Buddhism:

Among others, Buddha both upheld and clarified the concept of Yagna in language that laymen could comprehend. This goes contrary to the widespread belief that Buddha condemned the concept of Yagna as we shall see the concept of Yagna.

Meaning and Symbolism of Yagna:

The word Yagna is derived from the Yaj root as forming Yaj Pujayaam or Yaj Sangatikaranam. Yaj itself means to make an oblation to, to sacrifice, oblation, adore, honour, worship, respect, revere, and so on. From a purely ritualistic standpoint, it encompasses men, materials, form, structure, semantics, and mechanics.
Yagna in a social and philosophical context also implies several nobler aspects of sharing, interaction and harmony that span the entire universe. As it is commonly understood, Yagna is not performed in isolation barring the Brahma Yagna, which Brahmacharins (celibate Vedic students) perform. Mostly, a Yagna involves a congregation of varying numbers with the manifest goal of preserving Rta or the Cosmic Order. It follows that Yagna at the philosophical level, represents a deeper symbolism.

I’d like to look at Yagna as a neat formula handed to us to maintain the said Cosmic Order. It is similar to a mathematical formula to solve a problem. Although the formula by itself represents nothing, one cannot do without it because the problem will remain unsolved.

**Yagna as Sacrifice:**

A common miscomprehension of Yagna is in terms of semantics: in the sense of its usage as “sacrifice” implying cruelty. Performing a Yagna is an act of free will. Individuals performing a Yagna do so on their own accord for the implicit purpose of preserving the spiritual harmony of the universe. No book, authority, or personage prescribes—much less commands—performing a Yagna. However, this prescriptive aspect proves exactly how things can go wrong.

Inculcated as a desirable ritual over several generations, Yagna lost its original symbolism and degenerated into mere ritual. And this made it easy for those who chose to exploit this aspect, which is what happened in Buddha’s time. Buddha condemned this, the Yagna-as-mere-ritual, not the original symbolism.

**Buddha and the Vedic Yagna: Similarities:**

Buddha presents his understanding of Yagna in such simple terms as “My Yagna involves no animal sacrifice, no money to be spent,” and so forth. What he cloaked in such simple language was his emphasis on the superiority of the internal yagna (antar yagna). In Buddha’s words:
Make thy heart the sacrificial pit, and
Thy soul the sacrificial fire
[to householders unwilling to become renunciates]
Thy parents verily are venerable as the Agni
So welcome them always,
Thy wife and progeny the sacrificial fire
So treat them with such respect as it deserves, and
The Shramanas (monks) the fire to whom
Thou should’st pour all thy oblations.

It is easy to discern Buddha’s inspiration for these precepts. They read almost like a photocopy of these verses of Yajur Veda’s Jnana Yagna:

\[\text{Tasyaivam Vidusho Yagnasya Aatmaa}\\ \text{Yajamanah Sraddha patni Shariram Idhma...}\]

Loosely translated,
... [thus] Soul is the officiator,
Devotion the wife,
Body as the Samit (small pieces of wood),
Heart the sacrificial pit,
Hair the dried blades of grass (to be offered to the fire),
Veda/enlightenment the fire,
Desires the ones to be sacrificed,
[Our] Anger the animal to be killed (and offered to the fire)...

It is now amply clear what “sacrifice” stands for. Yet the misrepresentation of Yagna-as-sacrifice persists for several reasons, chief of which is political. Buddha’s angst as we have seen was directed towards the exploitative behaviour in the name of Yagna, and not against Yagna itself. Which presents a problem Veda-baiters choose to ignore: if they decry Yagna, they necessarily need to accept the symbolism that Yagna represents. It is equivalent to saying, “\text{I condemn curd but I don’t accept the existence of milk.}”
2.5.5. Theology:

The phrase "Buddhist theology" has an exotic and awkward sound. "Theology," after all, is a technical term from the lexicon of Christianity, and it means, etymologically and also often practically, "reasoned discourse about God." In what sense is there a Buddhist version of this enterprise? The main purpose of this collection is to provide an answer to that question; its secondary purpose is to provide examples of the practice of Buddhist theology.

It is as difficult to generalize about Buddhism as it is about Christianity. Both are very complex, and both are in transition from a medieval, conservative, and dogmatic to a modern, liberal, and scientific expression. Comparison between these two great Faiths, both claiming to be universal, is therefore extremely precarious and, indeed, is only possible in any detailed sense to the very ignorant or the very learned. The latter tend to be much less clear cut than the former, and I am not sure that the only true statement of the case is not this: It is impossible to make any generalization about either religion to which there does not immediately appear a striking contradiction; to compare the two is almost impossible.

*Buddhist Theology* comprises a series of essays by scholars of Buddhism (Buddhologists) working within American academia. However, what distinguishes this collection from many others is that all the contributors are professed Buddhists, and they make no attempt to disguise or apologise for this fact; quite the reverse. The strength of the book derives from its synthesis of scholarly, critical methods and personally committed spiritual investigation. Rather than try to examine Buddhism as though from the ‘outside’, the contributors position themselves within specific Buddhist traditions, albeit with a critical perspective. In other words, their scholarship rests upon a foundation of personal spiritual commitment rather than upon a paradigm of sociological-cum-historical analysis. The tradition of personal commitment varies from case to case but there is a strong bias towards Tibetan schools.

Since *Buddhist Theology* covers a wide range of topics and themes it is not possible to review them all here. Instead, I will focus on its central thesis.
Essentially, it proposes a new intellectual-cum-spiritual discipline that the contributors choose to call ‘Buddhist Theology.’ It argues that an appropriate environment for developing this discipline is the ‘academy’ (‘university’ in British English). Actually, this activity is not altogether new, but it has, so far, been conducted only in a rather peripheral manner. In naming and identifying the leading characteristics of this activity, the authors aim to demonstrate its legitimacy and so encourage its further development.

In particular, *Buddhist Theology* challenges the institutionalized legitimacy of ‘Buddhist studies’ by arguing that its claim to dispassionate, ‘non-committed’, scholarly examination of the Buddhist tradition is somewhat disingenuous.

*Buddhist Theology is divided* into three main parts and this review will focus on the first, more theoretical part. It begins with an editors’ introduction by Jackson and Makransky comprising two sections: first, ‘Buddhist Theology: it’s Historical Context’ and second, ‘Contemporary Academic Buddhist Theology: its Emergence and Rationale.’

This focuses on broadening and clarifying the meaning of ‘Theology’ so as to encompass Buddhist activity and the editors are at pains to extricate the term from its more popular connotations. ‘Theology’ is usually understood to mean ‘discourse about (the Christian) God’ but the term is of Greek origin and, as Jackson points out, it is found in Plato’s *Republic*, where it refers to poetical narratives about the gods. Originally, then, it seems that theology meant discourse about the divine. Tracy, a contemporary commentator on theology, has identified it as ‘intellectual reflection within a religious tradition.’ Later in the book, John Dunne writes:

Buddhist Theology is the self-conscious attempt to present reasoned arguments from within the tradition on issues of importance to Buddhists in order to correct, critique, clarify or expand the tradition. The definitions so far offered emphasize the primacy of intellectual factors in the practice of theology. However, the approach of Buddhist theologians cannot be confined to intellectual reflection if this is to admit abstract and theoretical considerations only. Their
reflection will be guided by volitional and emotional factors too, most fundamentally a desire for personal spiritual transformation, and is likely to be framed in an altruistic context. Buddhist Theology will then become a spiritually therapeutic activity, a spiritual exercise.

Jackson then tackles a potential objection to the project of Buddhist Theology. Some Buddhists will say, he admits, that since the aim of Buddhism is an experience that is beyond reason (attakavacara) theology is surely beside the point. Notwithstanding, he maintains, there remains a vast legacy of Buddhist intellectual reflection that can be examined. But why examine it? Jackson suggests that ‘we may use the term “theology” to describe conceptual activity within and about a particular religious tradition without thereby implying that such activity is an avenue to the ultimate.’ Jackson’s comment may be overcautious here. The anonymous critic seems to confuse means with ends; even if the Buddhist goal is ultimately beyond reason it does not follow that reason is dispensable as a means of moving towards it, simply that its limitations will eventually become apparent in the course of spiritual evolution. Somewhat disappointingly, this discussion of the raison d’être of the Buddhist theological enterprise lacks any detailed consideration of its potentially transformative impact upon the individual theologian. This seems a significant and regrettable omission.

The definition of Buddhist Theology just proposed does not aim to exclude non-Buddhist scholars from examining Buddhism altogether but it does exclude them from practising Buddhist Theology. In addition, they are, by definition, excluded from approaching Buddhism as the Dharma, that is, from approaching Buddhism as a means to spiritual liberation. The potential limitations and pitfalls of this approach were identified fairly early in the Buddhist tradition by, for example, the redactors of the Alagadduupama Sutta.

Here, bhikkhus, some misguided men learn the Dhamma … but having learned the Dhamma, they do not examine the meaning of those teachings with wisdom … they do not gain a reflective acceptance of them. Instead, they learn
the Dhamma only for the sake of criticising others and for winning in debates, and they do not experience the good for the sake of which they learned the Dhamma. Those teachings, being wrongly grasped by them, conduce to their harm and suffering for a long time.

The purpose of Buddhist Theology, then, will be to inspire transformation not only in oneself but in others too, and the critical methods, tools and approaches of the academy will be utilised under the gaze of this over-arching vision.

Theology is worth pausing to examine this definition. Makransky identifies five principal features of a Buddhist Theology:

1. It is done by scholars
2. These scholars stand normatively within their tradition
3. They look to traditional sources of authority
4. They seek to re-evaluate Buddhist teachings in the light of contemporary concerns,
5. They seek to contribute to the development of their tradition.

2.5.6. Chaturvarnas:

1. The Problem

Let us now pass on to another important problem. We have already said that the fourth purusharthas, Moksha, might be a later addition. Now the question is: Does it fit in well with the trivarga theory of purusharthas? According to some, it does not cohere with the trivarga theory. People like Dr. Rajendra Prasad argue that the addition of moksha makes the theory of trivarga inelegant. The discussion of the purusharthas would not therefore be complete without giving attention to this philosophical position.

2. The Nature of Moksha:

In order to pay attention to this position, we need to clarify the nature of moksha a little more. We have said that moksha is a personalistic goal. But by
personalistic we do not mean egoistic. It is personalistic in the sense that it is the self which is liberated. Even the Buddhist nirvana is something that happens to the individual. When we say that the mukta is egoless what is meant is that the real ego is refined. Even Hiriyanna, a very sympathetic interpreter of the moksha doctrine, admits that altruistic service may be required as a means to moksha, but moksha itself is an individualistic ideal.

Also, we have said that moksha means both Freedom from and freedom to. Of these, freedom from is mainly a personalistic concept. Freedom to may be thought of as a social concept but we are not told what freedoms to which moksha denotes or connotes. Is not sarva-mukti a social concept, it may be asked. Sarva-Mukti means that only the cosmic soul is liberated, and the individual souls are only its partial manifestations. So each one trying for his own liberation (and not for that of society) contributes to the liberation of all. If so, sarva mukti does not imply working for the liberation of others.

Then, What about the Jivanmukta (liberated while alive)? It only means that the liberated help others to attain their (individualistic) moksha. Not only that. There is no obligation for the liberated to do in order to retain his state of being a Jivanmukta.

3. Some Objections Met :

The point that is being derived at is this: For this and other reasons mentioned the concept of moksha does not cohere with the trivarga theory. For Moksha is a personalistic value while the trivarga has to do with social values. (i). This is one of the reasons why Krishna's argument may be taken as invalid. He tells Arjuna that if he performs his varnasrama dharma in a niskama manner and dedicates it to Krishna (God) then he is sure to attain moksha. This argument is defective because it creates two problems: i) It makes dharma, a social-functional goal, a means to moksha, a personalistic goal. ii) It is not made clear what is the proportionate causal share of nishkama karma and of dedication to God in the attainment of moksha.
(ii). To avoid this confusion of social goals with personalistic goal, someone might argue: The question of coherence of moksha with the trivarga does not arise at all. For, moksha is a purely religious value while the trivarga is a set of functional values; and therefore they belong to two different levels. This argument in fact affirms the position we have already substantiated. That is, moksha is not a pumshartha in the same sense in which the others are pumsharthas.

(iii). Even if we admit that moksha was introduced as the fourth pumshartha to make up for the apparent lack of emphasis on the individual as an individual in the trivarga theory, one question that comes up in this context is this: Do all the schools of Indian philosophy present moksha as a religious goal? This question is relevant because some schools do make tattvajnana (philosophic wisdom) a necessary condition for moksha. If so, is it not unfair to make the realization of a religious goal depend on a particular sort of philosophical expertise? If tattvajnana is made a means to moksha, moksha becomes unreachable to those religious people who lack this expertise, even though it might elevate the status of philosophy.

(iv). It is often held that moksha was introduced to fill in an important gap in the trivarga theory. But does trivarga as a social theory have such a gap? And even if there is such a gap can it be filled in by the concept of moksha? Prof. Rajendra Prasad argues that there is no such gap. For, for social well-being the trivarga scheme is self-complete. The trivarga covers all the goals humans pursue and ought to pursue in a social world. Dharma, the regulative principle, is sufficient to ensure social welfare which naturally includes the welfare of the members of the society.

(v). Moksha implies amorality. Of course, moksha introduces a personal element. But how does it affect the society, asks Prof. Rajendra Prasad. To put it in the Gita idiom, how can a sthitaprajna (completely self-composed) participate in the control of social evil or the increase of social good? Further, the acquisition of moksha helps develop an attitude of indifference
to one's surroundings. If so, how can the mukta play the role of an agent of the control of evil? The ideal of complete indifference, even to evil-doers, contains an element of amorality. Further, if moksha is achieved through tapas (self-torture) then it tends to undervalue the body whose social role is undeniable. If moksha, the professional goal, is the highest, why should I work for the society?

All conceptions of moksha do not require a social organization for its realization. Whereas, morality does presuppose a social organization. If so, there need not be a logical linkage between moksha and morality

4. The Role of Dharma :

According to some classical thinkers like Prabhakara, dharma is a purushartha in its own right and hence leading a dharmic life is an end in itself. Whereas in some other texts like the Vaisesika-sutra dharma is a means to moksha. Does it mean that moksha is a justification for being moral? Logically speaking, it cannot be, even if leading a moral life might require some such motivation. But motivation is not justification.

According to yet some others like Samkara, dharma is primarily a means to moksha. Leading a moral life is a condition for the attainment of moksha. In other words, moksha is the ultimate justifier of dharma. But moksha cannot, in point of logic play this role, as will become clear from our discussion of moksha a little later. The truth seems to be this: When moksha came to be regarded as the paramapurushartha it also became a fashion to say that anything worth aiming at derived its value from being a means to moksha. We will examine this when we consider the relation between moksha and philosophy in connection with the Nyaya-sutra of Gautama.

According to some scholars like Hiriyanna to regard dharma as a means to moksha is a higher point of view 20th one which regards it as an end in itself.

According to Hiriyanna, it is the highest standpoint reached by the ancient Indians because it is Vedantic. But Prof Rajendra Prasad rejects this for the
following reasons: i) It makes dharma a secondary value, rather than justify dharma. ii) It does not make the theory of pumsharthas richer. iii) To make dharma a means to (personal) salvation is to convert the theory of trivarga into a personalistic, asocial ethics. For, trivarga implies that all pursuits of man - individual, social, political or even religious - should be governed by dharma.

2.5.7. Chatur Purusharthas :
I. Why The Introduction of Moksha?
1. The Problem

We have already traced the cultural reason for the introduction of moksha as a purushartha while discussing the question of relationship between Indian philosophy and Moksha in a previous section. Now let us look at this introduction from a philosophical point of view. What is the logical role the concept of moksha plays in Indian philosophy? This question is important because, as we have already detailed, the concept of moksha pervades Indian life and philosophy more like an unquestioned article of faith than a logically reasoned and analytically defended principle. What is the theoretical reason for the introduction of the concept of Moksha in the scheme of pumsharthas? Does it serve the purpose for which it is introduced? By way of examining this question let us first look at the classification of pumsharthas into four which is the most popular in Indian philosophical and non-philosophical traditions.

2. The Classification of Purusharthas :

This classification into four does not seem to be a very neat one done exclusively from the normative point of view. For, looked at from a logical point of view, it mixes up what is actually desired with what ought to be desired. 'Is sought' and 'Ought to be sought' stand for logically different notions. True, what is in fact sought may also be that which ought to be sought. But this is only a coincidence and it is there as a matter of fact and not as a matter of logic. We seek artha and kama in fact. We might go on to say that they also ought to be sought and that therefore they are included in the scheme. But is it not contrary to the
general spirit of our philosophical tradition except that of the charvaka to treat
artha and kama as ends which ought to be pursued? Artha and kama ought to be
sought means that without their acquisition we will be lacking in perfection even
if we have acquired all other values. Here the problem is: If artha and kama ought
to be sought, how to explain the fact that we admire those who do without them?
One way of defending the normativity of the classification is this: Artha is sought
both as means and as end, but, one can argue, it ought to be sought only as a
means to kama and never as an end in itself. Similarly, kama is also actually
sought by men, but can argue here that it ought to be sought only if it is in
conformity with dharma. This seems to be the reason for including artha and kama
in the scheme. If so, this reason can be used to prove that the list is a list of things
which ought to be sought. But then two different principles are involved here. One
is: artha is an instrumental value and kama is an intrinsic value. Therefore the
relationship between them is a means -end relationship. The other is: If kama is
intrinsic, then we are not required to pursue it as a means to dharma. But kama has
to have the approval of dharma. We have to subjugate it to dharma. That kama
should have the sanction of dharma does not mean that if a pleasure is approved
by dharma, then it ought to be sought. i.e., not doing it would be wrong. All that it
means is that dharma is the justifying principle of kama. Therefore the relation of
kama and dharma is a justified -justifier relation. It is because of these two
different types of relationship that we consider the classification to be not
logically neat enough.

3. Does Moksha Justify Dharma?

What is the nature of moksha? Depending on the variety of thinkers, there
are several theories. All these theories imply that moksha is a descriptive concept.
If so, to say that dharma is a means to moksha is to make ethics subsidiary to
metaphysics. But ethics cannot be deduced from metaphysics. Moreover, moksha
can justify dharma only if it is obvious that we ought to seek moksha. But it is not
obvious, giving the fact that many do not desire it at all. Is not moksha desired by
all? Not likely, not even by the advocates of the Bhakti movement, as is clear
from the moral of. The satya-Narayana Katha. This story is perhaps the most popular katha all over India. The story centers round the performance of Satya Narayana Vrata (a dharmic Karma) for achieving artha and kama (worldly goals). The goal of those who perform it is not moksha. The moral of the story is that even if moksha is not the goal of a man in this life, he will get moksha in the next if he engages in dharma for achieving artha and kama. This means that this katha promises moksha without being desired. By implication this katha admits that moksha may not be the goal of a vast majority of people. Like Satya Narayana katha, Tulsidasa also represents the bhakti movement. At one time he too taught that bhakti of Ram can bring us moksha even if we do not desire it.

All this goes to show that the belief in moksha as the paramapurushartha did assume in ancient Indian philosophy the status of a postulate. No direct proof is possible for a postulate. Only a pragmatic proof can be given. An example of such a postulate would be the law of uniformity of nature: `The same cause produces the same effect under similar conditions.' But the belief that an appeal to moksha can justify dharma is not reasonable. Of course, the desire to attain moksha (mumuksha) can be a motivating reason (and not a justifying reason) for being moral. If moksha gives us eternal bliss or makes us completely free from pain or procure for us the most intimate company of god, and if morality is going to help us attain this then certainly knowing all this will motivate us for being moral. But, logically speaking, this reasoning is not different from any other which gives us motivation for morality. For example, one which says that dharma leads to social well being. All theories of motivation are alike in the sense that they can only account for the causes for being moral; but they cannot justify the whole system of morality.

5. Moksha-the Ultimate Value?

It may be argued that moksha is not a purely descriptive concept. For, in Indian philosophical tradition and culture moksha denotes not only the ultimate reality but also the ultimate value. Therefore, to make dharma a means to moksha provides not only motivation but also justification for being moral. But, that
moksha is the ultimate value does not follow from the belief that moksha is the ultimate reality. That is why we said that the view that the ultimate reality is also the ultimate value has assumed the status of a postulate. Some people think that moksha is the ultimate value because it is eternal. Even if it is true that what is eternal ought to be valued, it does not follow that it is the ultimate value. For, what is eternal cannot always be regarded as more desirable than what is not. If mere eternity of a thing makes it more desirable then eternal headache must be more desirable than momentary headache. It may be said that this argument is beside the point. The eternality of a thing makes it desirable only if it is in itself already desirable. But this argument is not conclusive either. For, bliss may be desirable in contrast to pain which is undesirable. If so, eternal bliss, because when achieved it will annihilate pain, may no longer remain desirable. Therefore, to say that absolute bliss is the absolute good because bliss is good, is to commit a more grievous error than to say that a big ant is a big animal because an ant is an animal.

Is moksha a higher value than dharma? It may be, but this does not follow from dharma being regarded as a means to moksha. For, it is not always true that the means is lower in value than that which it is a means to. For instance, honesty can be a means to making profit, but this does not mean that honesty is lower in value than making profit.

(v). That moksha is the highest value is to be intuited, it might be said. This claim clarifies the nature of experience in which moksha is felt as the highest value.

But it does not explain why moksha is the highest value. In reply to this, it may be said that moksha being the highest value we cannot ask why it is the highest value. Since we cannot ask for the justification for everything, we better stop at the stage of moksha. But, if we must stop at the stage of moksha, why could we have not stopped at the stage of morality is not clear. This only shows that trying to go beyond dharma to justify dharma is bound to fail.

The claim that moksha is intuited as the highest value and therefore no reason can be given to it is indefensible. For, such an intuitive knowledge
presupposes comparison with other values and comparison is the work of reason. If so, there must be some reasoning behind the claim, and if so, it must be given when asked for.

6. Moksha-the Only Intrinsic Value?

Suppose we say that moksha is the only intrinsic value (and not the highest) to which dharma is a means? Then the above objection can be avoided and can say that it is intuition (super rational experience) which assures us that moksha is an intrinsic value. The only problem is that this position suffers from all the defects of ethical intuitionism. For, example, if I claim that according to my intuition kama is the only intrinsic value (and not moksha), there would be no way available to the moksha proponents of refuting it or falsifying it.

Moksha is a purely intrinsic value of the highest order. Artha is only an extrinsic value. Dharma, according to some, is intrinsically valuable while according to some others, is only extrinsically valuable. Kama is also treated as intrinsically valuable. But it is not given a very elevated status at least in later post-vedic works (except by the chawakas). In so far as it is not treated as a means to something else, kama can be said to be intrinsically good. But considering the context of the theory of the purusharthas we cannot take such a position without qualification. For, the theory prescribes that kama should be in accordance with dharma. True, any agreeable feeling is intrinsically good in the sense that it is sought for its own sake and not for the sake of something else. But all agreeable feelings are not equally good. Therefore, the theory of purusharthas is not forced to identify the desired with the desirable. In other words, the theory makes room for distinguishing between desirable and undesirable pleasures. This is an advantage.

2.6. Indian Society:

In Indian society, caste is still the most powerful factor in determining the person’s dignity. The caste system is the result of the Hindu belief in reincarnation and Karma. The four Castes eventually developed into a social mosaic of 3000
subcastes, with the untouchables at the bottom of the list. The practice of caste system and untouchability was the corner stone of the Hindu society. The period from c. 500 B.C (the time coinciding with the rise of Buddhism) to the 14th and 5th centuries A.D (the Gupta Age) is widely regarded by historians as the period of the formation of the Indian Caste System and its supporting ideology (Habib, 2000: 169). The first most intricate theoretical exposition of the Brahminical societal structuring is found in Manusmriti. By the early centuries of the Common Era, Manu had become the standard source of authority in the Hindu orthodox tradition. According to the Varna model, the Harijans or Untouchables are outside the caste system, and contacts with Harijans pollute members of other four varnas (Srinivas, 1972). There is a hierarchy other than that of the pure and the impure, namely the traditional hierarchy of the four Varnas. The set of the four Varnas divides into two: the last category, that of the Shudras, is opposed to the block of the first three, whose members are ‘twice born’ in the sense that they participate in initiation, second birth, and in religious life in general (Dumont, 2002: 162). Brahmins introduced on elaborate system to preserve their purity. In order to maintain purity, all relations with lower castes were prescribed. Those who opposed the Brahmin religion were branded as untouchables and thrown out of the society. The caste system cannot be said to have grown as a means of preventing the admixture of the races or as a means of maintaining purity of blood.

The term scheduled caste is an administrative coinage and terms such as Chandala (Ambedkar 1982), exterior caste Harijan, purity in order to maintain Dalit (Ambedkar, 1987), etc have been in currency, each of which had a different origin. The breed of the Chandala is a degraded one and is ranked with that of dog and the pig. The concern here is that the Hindu doctrine of creation refers only to four varnas and if so, how does one court of Panchamas, those of the fifth? Gandhi adopted the use of the term “Harijan” in place of untouchable. He insisted that caste (Varna) was essential to Harijan. Ghurye divided untouchables into two: ‘pure’ and ‘impure’. The untouchables become pure through abjuring ‘beef and such other anathematic diet, this is precisely what M.S. Srinivas Christened as Sanskritisation. However, Sanskritization scarcely functional for achieving higher ritual status for the untouchables (Oommen).
The principle of graded inequality has been carried into the economic field. “From each according to his ability, to each according his need” is not the principle of the Hindu Social order. The principle of the Hindu Social order is: From each according to his need to each according to his nobility (The illustrations given above are merely drawn from imagination). They are facts of the history. Through Sanskritization movement, a section of untouchables who could improve their economic condition, either by abandoning or continuing their traditional occupations. A low caste was able, in a generation or two, to rise to a higher position in the hierarchy by adopting vegetarianism or teetotalism, and by sanskritizing its rituals and pantheon. They tried to justify their claims to a higher social status in caste hierarchy by inventing suitable mythologies.

2.6.1. The Republic of India - An Overview:

India’s affirmative action or preferential policies stems from an entrenched classification system based on a person’s caste in society. The first aim of this section is to understand the ideologies of the caste system which has led to discriminatory practices in India. Secondly, it will analyse the historical basis for this system. Like the principles of apartheid, the caste system is a contradiction of an egalitarian theory of a democratic country. This section will attempt to show how social hierarchy was integrated into and legitimated by a categorical or classification system. It will be shown how socially constructed values are taken as custom, culture or the norm of a particular society and therefore further validated. It will attempt to give an understanding of how the method of classifying people was more than just a cultural consequence or product but was a system that was invented and passed on from one generation to another.

One such classification system was the varna\textsuperscript{6} or the caste system as it is popularly known. In ancient India there developed a social system in which people were divided into separate close communities. These communities are known in English as caste.

\textsuperscript{6} Varna means colour in the sense of ‘characteristic’ or ‘attribute’.
2.6.2. The Caste System or Varna System:

Caste is defined as a rigid social system in which a social hierarchy is maintained generation after generation and allows little mobility out of the position to which a person is born.\(^7\) The caste or varna system is a characteristic determined by one’s birth into a particular caste, irrespective of the faith practised by the individual. Caste is therefore, descent based and hereditary in nature.\(^8\) This system dates almost 3000 years back and was formed based on the need to form a social order in ancient India. It is still very prevalent as part of India’s society, as the system itself has roots in ancient Indian society. Caste was not present in India since time immemorial. There were many migrations and conflicts among various groups. Discrimination on the basis of group began during this time, and religious and judicial notions were developed to justify caste.

Caste is therefore, fundamentally, a version of a classificatory strategy brought to India by the Indo-European invaders.\(^9\) The original caste system came about when the Aryans migrated from the north to India around 1600 BC. During the Vedic age, Manu\(^5\) founded four social orders based on four main goals of both humans and society. A social classification system of four different classes (varnas) was thus devised so that the human race could have a smooth and ordered life in society.

The word caste is especially used by Europeans to denote different classes into which the Hindus are divided.\(^10\) Varna or colour and jāti or race are the Indian versions of class or caste.\(^11\) Much of India’s discriminatory practices can be traced

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\(^7\) Benton W India and Pakistan (1972).
\(^8\) In much of Asia and parts of Africa, caste is the basis for the definition and for the exclusion of distinct population groups by reason of their descent. Over 250 million people worldwide continue to suffer under what is often a hidden apartheid of segregation, modern-day slavery, and other extreme forms of discrimination, exploitation and violence. Caste imposes enormous obstacles to their full attainment of civil, political, economical, social and cultural rights.
\(^10\) The founder of this ancient Hindu or Aryan society and the leader who survived the mythical flood and established the new social order, reflecting a return to spiritual values from an earlier and materialistic humanity. See Frawley D The Vedic Social Order, From The River of Heaven (1990).
\(^11\) According to Rose H A Caste (1945) 4ed at 976-86 the word was used by the earlier Portuguese travellers in the sense of tribe or even race, being often applied to the lowest Indian classes in contradistinction to their overlords.
back to the practice of the caste system. Indeed, India’s affirmative action measures itself are a response to this system of caste. According to Bouglé, the caste system divides the whole society into a large number of hereditary groups. These hereditary groups can be both distinguished from one another and connected together. The connection of these groups can be classified by three characteristics: separation in matters of marriage and contact, whether director indirect\(^{12}\); division of labour\(^{13}\) and finally hierarchy, which ranks the groups as relatively superior or inferior to one another.\(^{14}\) Legally the government disallows the practice of the caste system and has a policy of affirmative discrimination for the benefit of the backward classes.

The Constitution of India\(^{15}\) authorises the identification of historically disadvantaged castes, which are entitled to affirmative action in employment and other benefits.\(^\text{16}\) These are known as “scheduled” tribes and castes. They include India’s aboriginal inhabitants, or Adivasis, who comprise nearly 200 ethnic and culturally distinct peoples who speak more than 100 languages.\(^\text{17}\) The persons most likely to benefit from these programmes are the dalits or the untouchables of India, as they are the persons most adversely affected by this system of caste.

The issue of caste is a very complex and complicated one. Caste is perceived as “an exclusively Indian phenomenon which is not paralleled by any

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\(^{12}\) Chaturvarnya, the country of the four colours, is an ancient distinguishing epithet of India. To the present day, caste is regarded by other nations of the earth as the characteristic feature of the Hindus. In the earlier ages of society the system prevailed extensively throughout the world; but in the course of time it was abandoned in all countries except India and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). Among no other nation was it ever observed with such strictness or enforced by such severe penalties as among the Hindus.

\(^{13}\) The Constitution of the Republic of India of 1950 is the world’s lengthiest written constitution (with 395 articles and 8 schedules) and was passed by the Constituent Assembly on November 26 1949. It has been in effect since January 26, 1950.

\(^{14}\) This includes the Dalits and tribals (members of indigenous groups historically outside the caste system).

\(^{15}\) See the Background Paper on Refugees and Asylum Seekers from India (October 1998) UNHCR Centre for Documentation and Research Geneva.

\(^{16}\) “Dalit” is a term first coined by Dr. BR Ambedkar, one of the architects of the Indian constitution of 1950 and revered leader of the Dalit movement. It was taken up in the 1970's by the Dalit Panther Movement, which organised to claim rights for “untouchables”, and is now commonly used by rights activists. Dr. Ambedkar was born in 1891 into the untouchable Mahar caste and is widely regarded as one of the most ardent and outspoken advocates of the rights of Dalits in twentieth century India. At a time when less than of his caste was literate, he obtained a Ph.D from Columbia University in New York and a D.Sc. from the University of London. See the book by Keer D Dr. Ambedkar — Life and Mission (1990).

\(^{17}\) Chambers E Encyclopaedia (1951) at 150.
other institution elsewhere in its complexity, elaboration and inflexibility”. Kroeber describes the caste system as a “system of social stratification, examples of ranked aggregates of people that are usually rigid, birth-ascribed, and permits no individual mobility”. In the caste system everyone is classified. The castes, like the system of apartheid and racial discrimination, teach us a fundamental social principle; hierarchy. This classificatory system assumes that certain traits, qualities, functions, characteristics or powers are inherent in and definitive of each of the varnas. This system of caste is enormously complicated and not easily understood. This chapter attempts to simplify the issue of caste so as to give the reader an understanding of how the system works.

There has been a lot of debate about whether caste in India and much of South Asia is same or similar to the class systems in other countries like the USA. The following paragraph deals with this issue. An understanding of the caste and class systems is important in attempting an analysis of affirmative action policies in the USA, SA and India.

1. The Evolution of the Theories of Caste and Class:

In order to understand the process of legislative and judicial attempts in promoting equality in India, one has to have a perspective of the history of the diversified, hierarchical Indian social structure. Caste was not present in India since time immemorial. There were many migrations and conflicts among various groups. Over a long period of time a homogenous culture developed and intermarriage was normal. Later, with groups enclosing themselves, caste and endogamy became the rule. Discrimination on the basis of group began during this time, and religious and judicial notions were developed to justify caste.

Several studies suggest that social classes exist in India today and are distinguishable from the caste or varna systems. However, researchers are of the

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18 Kroeber A L Caste in Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences (1930) V(3) at 254(Kroeber).
20 Driver D Edwin and Drive E Aloo Social Class In Urban India (1987) at 32 (Driver).
21 There is a lot of literature on the Class System. See for example Fromm Erich Marx’s concept of Man (1966) at 163 for more information.
view that positions in the secular order (i.e. the class system) is indistinguishable from positions in the sacred or ritual order (i.e. the caste system). According to Karl Marx’s theory, class society is the product of a determinate sequence of historical change. Marx states that if one had to look at the primitive forms of human society, there was no class system. There only existed a low division of labour and if there were any property in common then it was owned by the members of the community. It would therefore appear that in the history of mankind all men were at one time equal. He however argues that due to the growth of private property and increased levels of wealth, man alienated himself and this created division in society.

Further, the system of class has evolved differently in each society and what constitutes a “class” is not necessarily identical in each type of class society. According to this theory, the class system based on race in SA and the USA and the system based on caste is similar although they have evolved differently because of the different historical and social contexts of these three countries. Accordingly, class is equated to caste.

Kroeber, in his interpretation of caste and class states that —

“Caste, is a special form of social classes, which in tendency at least are present in every society. Class differs from social classes, however, in that they have emerged into social consciousness to the point that custom and law attempt their rigid and permanent separation from one another. Social classes are the generic soil from which caste systems have at various times and places independently grown up.....”

In this sense caste is considered an extreme form of class. According to Dumont, the reason that caste is an extreme form of class is that caste is “at once rigid and relatively rare, whereas class is more flexible, vague and relatively very widespread”.

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22 Also see further Giddeons A The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies (1980).
23 Kroeber op cit 16 at 245b.
According to Weber’s theory of class and social inequality, a class “is any group of persons occupying the same ‘class status’ or ‘situation’”. According to the original Weberian formulation of class, “class situation is ultimately a market situation”. It will be shown how economic factors play a major factor in identifying one’s class.

According to Murdoch, J caste arose from two chief causes which included difference of race and difference of employment. In former times it was considered sufficient to follow the custom. This led to a stationary condition of society. At the risk of sounding too simplistic on this complex issue it is submitted that the caste system is similar to, if not the same as, the class system or is an extreme form of social stratification. The difference is that whereas race is a physical construct, caste is a social one. Apartheid in SA and segregation policies in the USA was based on one’s physical appearance but caste is based on one’s social position. In SA and the USA race is an immutable and obvious physical trait but in India a low-caste Indian may very well look like a high-caste Indian, the difference is on which social scale they were born.

There have been some judicial pronouncements on this issue of caste and class. The most famous one is the case of Balaji, where the court stated that there ought to be a clear distinction between “caste” and “class”. Other judgments have maintained that caste is also a class of citizens. In the Periakaruppan case, the court restated what was held in the Rajendran case, and held that “a caste has always been recognized as a class”.

2. Caste and Closure:

One theory regarding the origins of the caste system is closely linked to the issue of closure. Caste is closely linked to the concept of closure. Ambedkar has argued that caste practices might have arisen when one social group enclosed
itself from others. Exclusion and enclosure may have entailed advantages for this group. From this he argued that only the more socially powerful group would have both found benefit in such enclosure and also had the ability to isolate itself in this manner. Others followed, either by imitation of the more powerful social class or because they had no choice anyway. This concept of closure does not only refer to the exclusion of certain categories of persons from certain particular roles or types of roles, even though this is an essential part of closure. It refers also to what Ulf Hannerz would describe as closure in relational access and relational conduct. When one talks about closure in relational access, it means that a person is allowed to act in certain roles, but only in relation to certain categories of others. On the other hand, closure in relational conduct refers to a situation where a person has access to a particular role but is deprived of some of its usual rewards because he is expected to mould his conduct to fit some other attribute of his. The issue of caste as a mechanism of closure relates to the issue of the extent to which there is a role and relational closure on the basis of caste in economic, political and religious life.

The problems that closure had fashioned on the people of India are varied. With regard to the labour sector, the system of reservations for the SC’s in politics and government employment has been minimal as best. Small fractions of the low-caste population have progressed in society, but otherwise low-caste persons are rarely in a position of command and patronage because of their traditional caste superiors. In the social division of labour their role is largely that which it has always been; to provide heavy manual labour and perform the tasks regarded as particularly polluting and degrading.

In every respect, caste rejects the notion of human equality and thus justified enclosure of each Caste within its own boundaries on the basis of graded

30 A Periakaruppan v State of Tamil Nadu (1973) AIR 2310 (SC).
31 Molund Stefan First We Are People — The Koris of Kanpur between Caste and Class (1988) (Molund).
33 For example his gender, ethnicity or his caste. Hannerz op cit 31.
34 Molund op cit 30 at 11.
35 See Blunt E A H The Caste System of Northern India (1931).
inequality. In this set-up the idea of common good existed only within each caste group. In order to understand the caste and *varna* systems, one should have an idea of the philosophy which justified the system in the first place. Without this knowledge it would be very easy to condemn people for their doctrines which to most of the world is unjust and cruel. The following paragraphs deal with the origins of the caste system and whether or not it has any basis in religion. Since the end of the seventeenth century the question of whether caste is in essence religious or simply “social” has constantly arisen.36

3. Origins of the Caste System :

The Religious Theory of the Caste or Varna Systems :

There are many and varied theories about the establishment of the caste system. There are religious theories, biological theories37 and there are historical theories. The origin of the caste system is in Hinduism, but it has affected the whole Indian society. A person is considered a member of the caste into which he or she is born and remains within that caste until death, although the particular ranking of that caste may vary among regions and over time. Thus, caste is a many-layered social hierarchy developed several millenniums ago. According to Hindu tradition the caste system owes its origin to the four *varnas*.38 The religious theories explain how the four *varnas* were founded.39 This social system of “gradation” was given religious sanction by a verse in the ancient sacred writings of Hinduism and the earliest document of Indian history called the *Rig Véda*. According to the *Rig Véda*, the ancient Hindu book and the earliest literary source of Indian history, the primal man, Purush, destroyed himself to create a human society.40

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36 Dumont *op cit* 23 at 245.
37 The biological theory of the caste system claims that all existing things have essentially three qualities in different ratios. *Sattra* qualities include wisdom, intelligence, honesty, goodness and other positive qualities. *Rajas* include qualities like passion, pride, valour and other passionate qualities. *Tamas* qualities include dullness, stupidity, lack of creativity and other negative qualities. People with different doses of these inherent qualities adopted different types of occupation. It was this difference in qualities and occupation that was the origins of the caste system. See for instance Manu The Laws of Manu (1969) V(25) Trans. by George Buhler (Manu).
38 Buhler G The Sacred Laws of the Aryans as taught in the Schools of Apastamba, Gautama, Vasishta and Baudhayana V(ii) in Müller Max (ed) The Sacred Books of The East (1879) (Müller).
40 Manu *op cit* 37.
The oldest known passage from the *Rig Véda* which makes mention of the fourfold origin of the Hindu race is the ninetieth hymn of the tenth Book, called *Purusha Sukta*, or the hymn to the Purusha. The different *varnas* were believed to have been created from different parts of this primal man's body. The *Brahmans* were said to have been created from his head; the *Kshatrias* from his hands; the *Vaishias* from his thighs and the *Sudras* from his feet. The *varna* hierarchy is determined by the descending order of the different organs from which the *varnas* were created. Other religious theories claims that the *varnas* were created from the body organs of *Brahma*, who is the creator of the world.

The caste system in the religious form is a division of society in which there are four castes arranged in a hierarchy and below them the outcast, but socially the caste system was more complicated, with much more castes and sub-castes and other divisions. The highest *varna* is of the *Brahmans*. Members of this class are priests and the educated people of the society. The *varna* after them in hierarchy is *Kshatria*. The members of this class are the rulers and aristocrats of the society. After them are the *Vaisia*. Members of this class are the landlords and businessmen of the society. After them in hierarchy are the *Shudra*. Members of this class are the peasants and working class of the society who work in non-polluting jobs. According to the *Rig Véda*, there are only four orders and the Untouchables have no place in it. Each *varna* has certain duties and rights. Each *varna* member has to work in a certain occupation which only that *varna* members are allowed. Each *varna* has a certain type of diet. The caste hierarchy ends here. Anyone who does not belong to one of these castes is an outcast. It is these people who are considered to be outcasts who are the untouchables to the four castes. The untouchables of Indian society work only in jobs considered to be degrading; like cleaning the sewages or clearing away dead animals etc.

41 Ibid, 250.
43 See the book by Bhattacharya J Hindu Castes and Sects (1896).
44 Smith op cit 4 at 125.
45 Manu op cit 37 at 35.
46 Hocart A M Caste — A Comparative Study (1950).
47 They are considered to be without a caste and are regarded as ‘untouchable’ because they are seen as ritually polluting for caste Hindus. See Federal Research Division op cit 42.
The first three castes had social and economical rights which the untouchables did not have. The first three castes are also seen as “twice born”. This concept of “twice born” does not relate to the Hindu beliefs of reincarnation. Being “twice born” means that one come of age religiously, making the person a member of the Vedic religion, eligible to learn Sanskrit, study the Vedas and to be able to perform the Vedic rituals. The meaning of these two births is related firstly to ones natural birth and secondly to the ceremonial entrance to society at a much later age. Each varna and also the untouchables are divided into many communities. These communities are called jat or jāti. The Shudra is the largest varna and it has the largest number of communities. Each jat is limited to professions worthy of their varna. Each jat is limited to the varna diet. Each jat members are allowed to marry only with their jat members. People are born into their jat and it cannot be changed. This is the how the caste system is supposed to be in its religious form but in reality it is much more complicated and different from its religious form.

A defining feature of Hinduism, caste, seems to have been described as a system encompassing a complex ordering of social groups on the basis of ritual purity.

4. The Theory of Purity:

The caste system is supported not only by theological doctrines like Karma and the Transmigration of the Soul (Dharma), but also by ideas like those regarding purity and pollution. The pre-existence of caste is founded on

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48 The Vedas and all their parts are shruti, “revelation”. However, it looks like even the oldest parts of the Rig Veda do not antedate the arrival of the Aryan in India, although the gods and elements of the stories are older, since they are attested with Iranian peoples and the Mitanni, with parallels in Greek and Latin mythology. The word ‘veda’ is from the root ‘vįd’, “to know”, making for other derivates like vidya, “knowledge,” and avidya, “ignorance”. Vedas are traditionally taught by a Brahmin teacher (guru) orally to a student (brahmaicārīn) in sequences (called “branches”) of associated samhitās, brāhmanas, āranya-kās, and upanishads. See Contributions to Indian Sociology op cit 10.


50 Ibid. Jāti means race; varna, colour, arising from the difference of race. For example the Brahmans have Jats called Gaur, Konkanash, Sarasvat, Iyer and others. The outcasts have Jats like Mahar, Dhed, Mala, Madiga and others.

51 The law of Karma teaches that responsibility for unskilful actions is born by the person who commits them.
ideas of purity and pollution.\textsuperscript{52} The theory of purity relates to both, a prohibition on contact between the different castes and to food. These prohibitions played a vital role in the caste system as it accounts for the contrast between the Brahmins and the Untouchables.\textsuperscript{53}

The Brahmins, who were priests, are considered to be of supreme rank in the caste system and therefore the purest caste. The Untouchables were the lowest rank, tasked to perform all the “dirty work” and were therefore the impure servants and largely segregated from the rest of the persons in the caste system. The Untouchables were therefore not allowed to associate with or use the same wells, enter the same temples or even use the same facilities of the higher castes.

Articles of food were divided into pure and impure by degrees. The various sections of the country differed greatly in sacredness and impurity. A principle that actions alone that are holy and sacred ought not to be done with impure associations appears to have been well recognised. Purifying agencies and ceremonies for purification existed. Purity was closely associated with good omen, i.e., those things which were supposed to bring good results or fortune, by their association, as good omens do, and impure things would bring misery. Various substances were graded on the principle of purity. This affected who gave food to the higher caste people, or how food was obtained etc. Together with impure articles there existed two other kinds of articles, which may be called pure and purifying.

This policy of segregation was based on the notion of the untouchables being ritually polluting. By the same token different castes could not work together for fear that contact with the untouchables rendered them impure. The main purpose for a discussion on the ideas concerning purity and pollution is that such a discussion will enable the reader to understand the reasons why the existence of the caste system depends on that which is pure and that which is

\textsuperscript{52} Hocart A M On Caste — Religion and Power in Dumont L & Pocock D F Contributions to Indian Sociology op it 10.

\textsuperscript{53} Bouglé C The Essence and Reality of the Caste System (1958) (Bouglé).
It is believed that caste in India is strong and rigid because the ideas of the people regarding purity and pollution are rigid. The Brahmans are at the top of society because he is considered to be more pure and sacred than the other castes, whilst the “untouchables” for example, are at the bottom because they are considered to be impure. This purity or impurity, depending on how one looks at it, is the pivot on which the entire system turns.

5. The Historical Theory of the Caste System:

According to the historical theory, the caste system began with the Indo-Europeans invasion of India. A series of migrations by Indo-European-speaking semi-nomads took place during the second millennium BC known as the Aryans. Due to this invasion by the Indo-Europeans in India another theory of the history of the caste system seems to have its origins. As there is no concrete evidence to this effect, it appears that the varna system does have ancient roots and is fundamentally a version of a classificatory strategy brought to India by the Indo-European invaders during the second millennium. It has been argued that the social classes are as a direct result of foreign rule.

According to this theory, it was due to the Indo-European influence that the Aryans organised themselves into three groups. The first groups were of the warriors called the Kshatrias and the second groups were the Brahmans. These two groups struggled politically for leadership among the Aryans. In this struggle

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54 Ibid. The Brahmans are at the top of society because he is considered to be more pure and scared than the other castes, whilst the “untouchables” for example, are at the bottom because they are considered to be impure. This purity or impurity, depending on how one looks at it, is the pivot on which the entire system turns.

55 See in general, Robert Madhura Sutta on Caste (April 1984) JRAS at 360-66.

56 Federal Research Division op cit 42.

57 Ibid, 150

58 Dumont op cit 23 at 249.

59 Smith op cit 4 at 79.

60 The first effect that the British had on the caste system was to strengthen it since they gave the British the Brahmans special privileges. It seems that the British had favourites and their favourites became higher classes and their non-supporters were kept poor. The caste system was however, eventually broken up greatly during the period of British rule in India. See Driver op cit 19 at 29.

61 Elmore W Theodore Dravidian Gods in Modern Hinduism — A Study of the Local and Village Deities of Southern India (1915).
it is believed that the Brahmans got to be the leaders of the Aryan society.\footnote{It is important to take note that the early Hindus were always anxious to perform the service of their Gods. It was believed that it was the gods who conquered the enemy, it is the gods who vouchsafe a rich harvest. Health, wealth, children, friends, flocks and gold are all gifts from the gods. Among a nation of this peculiar stamp the priests were certain to acquire great influence at a very early period, and like most priests, they were as certain to use it for their own advantage. See Dumont \textit{op cit} 23.}

The third group consisted of the farmers and craftsmen and they were called \textit{Vaisia} or the \textit{Shudras}.\footnote{Das A \textit{The Vaisya Caste I The Gandhvanijs of Bengal} (1903) (Das).} The Aryans who conquered parts of North India made the locals their servants. In this process the \textit{Vaisai’s} who were the farmers and craftsmen became the landlords and the businessmen of the society and the locals became the peasants and the craftsmen of the society.\footnote{Karan P P and Weiner M \textit{India The World Book Encyclopaedia} (1985).} According to this theory, the roots of the caste system was as a direct result of the Indo-European invasion of India.

There exists, along with the ritually ranked system of \textit{Jatis}, another ranking system, based on landownership or property-ownership. Considerations surrounding a person’s status generally came in the way of judging a person by the type of work being done, for e.g., a property-owner doing manual work was rated low and therefore a property-owner doing this type of work was considered lower than that owner not doing such work. The actual work of cultivation on land was carried out by tenants, hereditary servants and casual labourers. Each family of landowners or property-owners were served by members of a specialist caste such as a carpenter, blacksmith, potter, laundryman, barber and priest. These so-called “serving families” were then rewarded with an agreed-upon quantity of grain which would be given to them at the end of each harvest. The Indian community during this period of time was largely a barter economy with cash playing a minimal role.

The landowner was considered to be the patron of those who performed various services for him, and also to others who sought his support and protection. These patron-client relations dominated caste relations across the board, and formed the basis of division between the people of India, and each village was divided into two or more different castes. These divisions are as much as part of
village life as is the caste system. So it can be said that the rural areas in most parts of India is characterized by the existence of dominant castes, which own a substantial amount of land suitable for cultivation, enjoy strength of numbers, have a higher status in the local order, and exercise significant power over the other castes. Traditionally, it was the council of the dominant castes who were the one’s responsible for the maintenance of law and order in the villages and punished wrongdoer’s, and were therefore very powerful people. In this way the division of the people and the caste system were further segmented.

As can be seen from the above discussion there are various theories regarding the ancient roots of the caste or varna systems. Some scholars searching for the roots of the Indian theory of the social classes concentrate very little on the Indo-European origins and more on indigenous evidence found in the texts called the Dharma Sūtras and Sāstras. These texts are an extension of what is to be found in the Vedas and are considered to be the locus classicus of the Indian formulation of varna.

According to Dumont, caste has no place in the Vedas.65 Max Müller argues that the government of India ignores the origins of caste for the purposes of identification of persons and taking of census.66 Müller’s theory of the origins of caste is complex and further argues that caste is a social situation, i.e., caste is dependent on ones birth and is also relative to the degree of ones education. Weber too argues that caste is a particular kind of status group and has nothing to do with religion.67

Taking into account the various opinions on the origins of caste, what remains constant is that whichever theory is adopted the caste system still remains rigid, hereditary and discriminatory in nature.68

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65 Dumont op cit 23 at 25.
66 Müller F Max Chips from a German Workshop (1867) V(II) at 297-356.
68 Dumont op cit 23 at 250.
The British and India:

It should be borne in mind that another theory relating the beginnings or origins of caste has to do with the time that India was colonized by the British. India was once a British colony. The British left behind them in India a legacy of their ideologies and culture and even today it is evident that English, a language of their oppressors, is a very important and respected language in India. The British influence is apparent even in most of the laws in India. Some laws, like SA, have been directly adopted and adapted from the English laws.

Some scholars suggest that the resulting depiction of the caste system was as much a product of European racist theories, and the interests of colonial rule, rather than Indian cultural realities. Modern scholars further suggest that prior to the colonial period castes were much more open and flexible. There are several passages in the Vedas which indicate that the four varnas were initially based on professions and not simply determined by birth. It was during a later period that the current rigid caste system came into place.

However, with regard to the caste system, the first effect of consequence that the British had on the caste system was to strengthen it. In fact, the British saw the advantages in preferring some groups above others. As the Brahmins were once very powerful in influencing the people of India, they gave the Brahmans back special privileges that the previous Muslim rulers had taken away.

So even though there were privileges given to certain of the groups in India, for the most part the discriminatory practices that were practised amongst the various groups were completely ignored by the British. Some have argued that this attitude was seen as a form of indirect support for the caste system by the British. The overall British policy towards caste was seen as a policy of non-interference. Further, during this period of British rule in India, the practices of untouchability as well, received limited and for the most part indirect support from the law.
However, the caste system was eventually broken up greatly during the period of British rule in India.\(^{69}\) It has been argued that the British government of India had a considerable, transforming impact on the country’s Hindu social structure. The establishment of both a countrywide legal system and a widespread consciousness of rights took hold.\(^{70}\) Importantly, the vast machinery of protective discrimination for the SC’s was developed chiefly in the 1930's and 40's under the British. Services under the state became the focus of attention for historical and economic reasons. The British brought change by passing many important laws designed to aid the marginalised lower castes. However, the British could not find a lasting solution to the problem of castes, particularly since the British saw themselves as a privileged ruling class. The courts themselves attempted to champion a standard of equality before the law and, with a few exceptions, applied the same rules to all. For example, in the application of Hindu law to family and ceremonial matters, *varna* and caste distinctions remained relevant in some areas, but these legal categories did not spread to other fields.\(^{71}\) The abolition of slavery in the middle of the nineteenth century extended basic rights to many untouchables.\(^{72}\) At least formally then the untouchables of the caste system enjoyed equality in the eyes of the law and had access to it. In practice however, establishments often adapted themselves to accepted patterns of discrimination. However, the general features of the *legal system* were not in concert with the expressed discrimination of the *social system* and appraised inequality continued on a social level. While scholars differ on the origins of the caste system in India, they agree that it is a very ancient institution.

### 6. Economic Privileges and the Division of Labour:

Division of labour exists in all countries. However the division of labour according to the Hindu caste is peculiar. The caste system links the division of


\(^{70}\) On the general character of the legal system see Galanter M Competing Inequalities —Law and the Backward Classes in India (1984) at 1968b (Galanter).

\(^{71}\) As customary law was supplanted, the use of caste as a criterion in the application of general criminal, civil, and commercial law was restricted and eventually discarded.

\(^{72}\) Legal enforcement of slavery was outlawed by the Indian Slavery Act V of 1843; possession of slaves was made a criminal offence by the Indian Penal Code Act XLV of 1860 section 370.
labour with hierarchy. This system of caste also distinguishes the Indian form of social division of labour from the modern economic form, which is orientated towards individual profit and in which the market is left to regulate the whole. Here, the knowledge and skill acquired by the father descends to the son. Importantly, in traditional Indian society, the fourfold varna theory describes a broad functional division of labour. Though the caste system has not prevented occupational mobility for caste Hindus, many untouchable communities have been forced to continue their occupations as leather workers, disposers of dead animals, or scavengers, and to perform other tasks deemed too ritually polluting for upper castes. If a person belonged to the Brahman varna then the occupations that were open to them were various.

The upper castes always had the privilege of following the occupation of their inferiors but not of their superiors. Shudras too were allowed a considerable margin of occupations. All the trades, like carpenters, physicians, barbers, elephant trainers and goldsmiths were allowed to a Shudra. This was in direct contrast to the type of jobs that could be done by the lowest class in India, the Untouchables. In the idealised Hindu varna system, being born into a high varna was seen as a reward for virtue in a previous life. Similarly, being born in a low varna was seen as punishment for sins in a previous life.

The “twice born” account for about forty-eight percent of Hindus. The rest are Shudras and Untouchables. The Shudras may represent the institutional provision that the Aryan made for the people they already found in India. The Shudras thus remain once born, and traditionally are not allowed to learn Sanskrit or study the Vedas. Their dharma is to work for the twice born, but even below the Shudras are the Untouchables, who are literally outcastes, without a varna, and are regarded as “untouchable” because they are ritually polluting for caste Hindus. Some Untouchable sub-castes are regarded as so polluted that members

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73 Contributions to Indian Sociology op cit 10.
74 He could become a priest, an occupation which was considered proper for his caste, or he could become a soldier, an officer of the state, a money-lender or even a farmer, but he was not to become a domestic servant.
75 Curstairs op cit 49.
76 Ibid, 160.
are supposed to keep out of sight and do their work at night: They are called Unseeables.⁷⁷ Throughout India’s history, movements have appeared within Hinduism criticising preferential treatment according to caste (or varna).⁷⁸

According to Hocart, caste and profession are linked through the intermediary of religion. However, according to Dumont, there are some religiously neutral professions which are followed by a number of different castes.⁷⁹ According to Blunt each caste could be made to correspond to an occupation or “groups of connected occupations”. He states that people were divided according to the types of work that they did. It was this division in labour that caused their formation from others.⁸⁰

Dumont summarises the relationship between caste and profession as follows —

“The link between caste and profession is primarily a matter of status, the important thing is the hereditary profession provided it is not contradicted by following too inferior a profession, and that the system has probably always carried with it some plasticity of this sort, while village specialities, ritual or other; constitutes its solid core.”⁸¹

All humans are born unequal in the caste system, and what can be observed from the four major “varnas” is that the labouring caste (or class) is lowest in the social hierarchy. The caste system invariably has ensured that manual labour has no dignity.

2.6.3. The Untouchables and Segregation

Untouchability has its roots in India’s caste system, which is supposed to be more than 1,500 years old. The untouchability feature in the caste system is perhaps the world’s longest surviving social hierarchy. In different parts of India

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⁷⁷ Bhattacharya J Hindu Castes and Sects (1896).
⁷⁸ These movements have included Buddhism, Jainism, Bhakti poets and saints, the Lingayats, Sikhism and philosophers such as Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. BR Ambedkar.
⁷⁹ Dumont op cit 23 at 93.
⁸⁰ Blunt E A H The Caste System of Northern India (1931).
⁸¹ Dumont op cit 23 at 97.
the Untouchables were treated in different ways. The Untouchables are not allowed to touch people from the four *varnas* and were not allowed to enter the houses of the higher *varnas* because of their impure status.

Like the system of segregation and apartheid in both the USA and SA, the untouchables were excluded and barred from entering the temples; they were not allowed to use the same wells used by the *varnas* and on public occasions they were compelled to sit at a distance from the four *varnas*. Even punishments as with privileges were systematically graded according to *varna* or social class category. The courts too cemented the ideals of the caste system in various decisions before it. The Courts upheld caste by issuing injunctions and awarding damages for purificatory ceremonies after lower caste persons had “polluted” a sanctuary. It was considered a criminal offence for a member of an excluded caste to knowingly pollute a temple by his presence. Against this background the caste system was allowed to fester. It has been argued that the caste system is not purely and simply a professional system but there seems to be a definite relationship between caste and profession. Caste tends to make professions hereditary and thereby prevents the full development of peoples own faculties. Caste also leads to a stationary civilisation and makes labour degrading.

Keeping in mind that caste and professions are linked through the common theory of religious beliefs then the more pure or cleaner the job the higher the caste will be of the person performing that job. Bouglé writes that “in the Hindu civilisation it is above all religious views, rather than economic tendencies, which determines the rank of each group”.

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82 In some regions the attitude towards the untouchables was harsh and strict. In other regions it was less strict. In regions where the attitude was less strict the untouchables were seen as polluting people and their dwellings were at a distance from the settlements of the four *Varṇa* communities.
84 Thus Brahman’s crimes were punished less severely than were those of the *Kshatriyas*, whose crimes were punished less than those of the *Vaishyas*, and so on.
85 See the cases of *Anandraw Bhikji Phadke v Sankar Daji Charya* (1883) ILR 7 Bombay 323 and *Sankaralinga Nadan v Raja Rajeswara Dorai* (1908) 35 IAC 176.
86 *Chathummi v Appakuttan* (1945) AIR 232 (Mad.) and *S K Wodeyar v Ganapati* (1935) AIR 371 (Bom.), where damages were awarded although the parties agreed that there should be no finding on the question of pollution.
87 *Atmaran v King-Emperor* (1924) AIR 121 (Nag.).
88 *Contributions to Indian Sociology* op cit 10 at 49.
89 *Ibid* at 50.
2.6.4. Discrimination and Exploitative Forms of Labour

In the Indian context the social division of labour takes place on the basis of the role they play within the economy. This division which was clearly a hierarchy was called the *Chatur Varna* i.e. four *varnas* or castes. The second division was based on the occupational specialisation of the caste-groups and this sub-division took place essentially amongst the *Vaishya-Shudra* and was called *jāti*. Expulsion from a caste meant expulsion from the caste system itself. Such expulsion meant that a person could no longer practice the occupation of the caste system from which he had been expelled, neither could he become a member of any other caste as membership of a caste could be acquired only by birth in that case. Thus being expelled from the caste system was as good as being expelled from society itself.

Only the membership of a caste entitled a person to practice the vocation allotted to that caste under the caste system. This kind of a relationship between occupation and caste made it in the direct interests of members of various castes to observe the caste vocations strictly and thus also the caste system. Infringement of caste rules of vocation could lead to expulsion. Thus a *chamar* (shoe maker) had to remain a *chamar* all his life. This also meant that every member of a caste had to observe all other caste rules like untouchablity, unapproachability, endogamy, etc., under the threat of expulsion from his caste if he dared to break the caste rules. Some force, be it social, religious, psychological, physical or political was necessary to hold this division of society.

Within the caste system, *dalits* have been assigned tasks and occupations that are deemed ritually polluting for other caste communities. A majority of

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90 Das *op cit* 63.
91 The *jāti* division functioning within the *Varna* hierarchy represented only an occupational sub-division of what was basically the producing function. The creation of social groups who would undertake production was a logical pre-requisite for an occupational division to take place amongst it.
92 If he tried to become a *kumar* (potter) or *darji* (tailor) he was in danger of being expelled from the *chamar* caste and obviously under the caste rules he would not be admitted into any other caste in spite of his having the knowledge of any other vocation.
93 In India, the system was held together with the caste system and the belief of birth and rebirth and in the west it was held together by portraying the view that blacks were both intellectually and morally inferior to whites.
Dalits are bonded labourers.\textsuperscript{94} According to government statistics, an estimated one million Dalits are manual scavengers.\textsuperscript{95} Bondage, like the other professions of the untouchables, is passed down from birth. Occupations like scavenging and prostitution are also hereditary. Dalits face discrimination when seeking other forms of employment and are largely unable to escape their designated occupation even when the practice itself has been abolished by law.\textsuperscript{96}

Around the 6th century, many individuals of the lower castes who were getting fed up of suppression turned to Buddhism. Buddhism actually began as a reaction to the violence of Hindu society, including the brutality of the caste system (Essortment). Buddhism concentrates not on the society, but on the individual, thus separating religion from the interests of the ruling and dominance. In Buddhism, one is no longer born into a position due to past injustice. Although Buddhism does see life as pain and suffering and reincarnation as a renewal of this suffering, there is a potential escape (Essortment). The Buddha, himself born into the warrior caste, was a severe critic of the caste system. Buddhism utterly rejects any system of caste, and it actually reached high levels of support during the rule of Ashoka, who adopted the Buddhist concept of ahimsa, or non violence, and its tendency toward greater equality (Essortment). He ridiculed the priests who claimed to be superior, criticized the theological basis of the system, and he welcomed into his community people of all castes, including outcasts. His most famous saying on the subject was, “Birth does not make one a priest or an outcaste. Behaviour makes one either a priest or an outcaste”. Even during the time when Buddhism was decaying in India and Tantrayana (another sect of Buddhism practiced after the 7th century) had adopted many aspects of Hinduism, it continued to welcome all castes.

\textsuperscript{94} The Human Rights Watch \textit{op cit} 83 at 334.
\textsuperscript{95} Manual scavengers are people who clean public latrines and dispose of dead animals.
\textsuperscript{96} National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights Black Papers — Broken Promises and Dalits Betrayed (1999) (\textit{Broken Promises}).
2.6.5. Reform:

It was the Industrial Revolution that finally made a dent in the caste system and brought a new awareness to Indians that social mobility might be possible. Industrialization encouraged urbanisation, as villager dwellers of both high and low castes moved into the cities for better jobs. There, they were introduced to new technologies. In the urban areas, the rigid, age-old, caste — centered thinking gave way to a more liberal outlook, encouraging the mixing of castes without distinction. Trade unions and other associations had members from all castes working together. The strongest, most systematic attack on the caste system has come in the twentieth century through the Constitution of India, adopted on November 26, 1949. India’s constitution guarantees the right of all its citizens to justice, liberty, equality, and dignity. It has been a long journey from ancient caste distinctions based on Hindu philosophy and religious traditions to the constitutional pledge of a democratic government with equality, dignity, and justice for all human beings.

Further, there were two leaders who fought for the betterment of the untouchables. The first, Mohandas Karamchand Ghandi, emerged as the leader of the nationalist movement; and he linked the eradication of untouchablity, as well as unity between Hindus and Muslims with the goal of independence from Britain. The other reformer was B R Ambedkar, a Columbia University educated lawyer and statesman, who was also an untouchable. He wrote into the Constitution the world’s first affirmative-action programme. This system of “reservations”, or quotas, gave untouchables and other underprivileged groups, proportional representation in legislatures, government jobs, and educational institutions.

Presently, India has tough laws against individual discrimination on the basis of caste. There is a policy for the socio-economic upliftment of the erstwhile

98 Dr. Ambedkar tried to root out the worst excesses of the caste system by making discrimination against untouchables a criminal offence. See Gore M S The Social Context of an Ideology — Ambedkar’s Political and Social Thought (1993).
lower castes, by the provision of free education till graduation, reservation of admission seats in institutions for higher education, a fifty percent quota in government jobs with faster promotions. Further, resolutions and orders confirming the right of Untouchables to equal use of governmental facilities, schools and wells were passed in Bombay and Madras as well as in several of the progressive princely states. In 1923 the Bombay Legislative Council resolved that Untouchables be allowed to use all public watering places, schools, dispensaries etc.

In 1932 the number of reserved seats in Parliament was made proportionate to the number of untouchables in the population. The occupants of such reserved seats were elected by the total voting population and not by an electorate of untouchables alone. This arrangement continues today. Through the process of reservations and quotas one in seven seats in central and state legislatures is occupied by an Untouchable representative. Largely due to the efforts of Gandhi and Ambedkar in the 1920's, a number of bills were passed in central and state legislatures and, in princely states, to open temples to all and the protection of low castes from various disabilities was legislated. Further, a conference of caste Hindus, convened in Bombay on September 25, 1932, to ratify the Poona Pact which unanimously adopted the following resolution —

“This Conference resolves that henceforth, amongst Hindus, no one shall be regarded as an untouchable by reason of his birth, and that those who have been so regarded hitherto will have the same right as other Hindus in regard to the use of public wells, public schools, public roads, and all other public institutions............”

99 The Princely States included Rajastan.
100 Government of Bombay (State Committee) (1930) at 52.
101 The Poona Pact, agreed to by Leaders of Caste-Hindus and of Dalits, at Poona on 24-9-1932. The following is the text of the agreement arrived at between leaders acting on behalf of the Depressed Classes and of the rest of the community, regarding the representation of the Depressed Classes in the legislatures and certain other matters affecting their welfare:

There shall be seats reserved for the Depressed Classes out of general electorate seats in the provincial legislatures as follows: Madras 30; Bombay with Sind 25; Punjab 8; Bihar and Orissa 18; Central Provinces 20; Assam 7; Bengal 30; United Provinces 20. Total 148. These figures are based on the Prime Minister’s (British) decision.
The Poona Pact is significant in that it initiated a pattern of political compromise between “caste” Hindus and the Depressed Classes in the allocation of legislative representation and government jobs.

In 1938 the Madras legislature passed the first comprehensive and penal act to remove social disabilities, making it an offence to discriminate against Untouchables not only in regard to publicly supported facilities such as roads, wells, and transportation, but also in regard to “any other secular institution” to which the general public was admitted, including restaurants, hotels, shops etc.102 The Act also barred judicial enforcement of any customary right or discrimination based on membership in such a group. In spite of these affirmative action’s, identification and discrimination based on castes is quite common in the Indian society. Matrimony between members of different castes is still looked down upon and not very popular.

2.7. Buddhist Social Order and Rejection of Casteism (Varna) :

Buddhist society at that time was divided into two distinct classes, though not social classes as we know them. The former class is Pabbajita, the recluse society or the Sangha; and the latter is Gahatta-householder or lay society. The lay society is always larger than the recluse society. Although majority of the people in the society prefer lay life, still it is troublesome and it is an obstacle for spiritual development, but the life of recluse is clear like a space or open sky. Some people prefer to renounce household life to become recluses. There is the case of Ratthapala, a young lay disciple who desired to become a bhikku, realizing that lay life had its obstacles:

“In so far as I understand the doctrine taught by the Buddha, it is not easy for one living in a house to fare the Noble faring (brahmacariya) completely fulfilled and pure…”(Barzun et al,1959,p.143-144)

This point had been earlier proved by the case of Prince Jayasena, who had failed to understand the teachings even as taught by a novice. His mind was quite

distracted by sense-pleasures. Therefore, while in many Buddhist countries such as Taiwan or Japan, the monk and the layman respect each other, the lay follower is considered second to the bhikku because the latter has more chances of attaining enlightenment; though it should not be said that lay followers cannot attain it. Rather the latter is regarded simply as more difficult.

Thus, Buddhist society tends to get stratified into four categories as follows.

i) Pabbajita = Bhikku or Buddhist monk  
ii) Bhikkuni = Buddhist nun  
iii) Gahattha = Upasaka or Buddhist layman  
iv) Upasika = Buddhist woman

The spiritual division of the Buddhist society is made into Pabbajita and Gahattha. According to the spiritual attainments and the level of realization of Dhamma,

In the Suttas we find classification of society into Puthujjana and Savaka. Puthujjana is a person who has not heard the dhamma, who has not seen ariya, who has not gained the skills of ariya and who is not disciplined in the discipline of ariya. Savaka is a person who has heard the dharma, and who has seen Dharma and Sangha, and it inspires him to work towards cultivating these qualities in himself.

“According to Dhammika Sutta of Suttanipata, the members of the Pabbajita society should lead life as the drops of water on the lotus leaves. They should not attach themselves to anything including the very necessities of life, such as food, shelter, clothing etc. They have to abandon family including wife and children, land, shelter, gold, silver, ornaments, servants etc. The Buddha has described it in "Iriyapatham Pabbajitanilomita" as the way of practice which should be followed by monks and nuns”. (Sutta Nipata (WH 82).

The members of gahattha society should follow gahathavatta- the ethics prescribed for lay people. They should look after their parents righteously and
engage themselves in business honestly. They should practice what is prescribed for them legally. In other Suttas the members of gahatta society are described as the ariya, who has gained the skills of ariya and who is disciplined in the discipline of ariya.

Practice of Buddhism includes observances; some are common to all Buddhists while others are characteristics of a particular culture or country. These observations may take the form of offerings and bowing before the image of the Buddha or the chanting of certain verses from Buddhist scriptures. On special day like Vesak and Ullambana the Buddhist community celebrates the occasions through various activities.

The shrines found in Buddhist houses or temples are focal points of Buddhist observations. At the center of the shrine there is usually an image of the Buddha which is made of materials such as marble, wood, gold or clay. This image is a symbol which helps people to remember the qualities of the Buddha. The shrines may have objects like a volume of Buddhist scriptures to represent the Dharma. Other shrines may include images, photograph of Buddhist monks to represent the Sangha. When a Buddhist stands before a shrine the objects are seen by him which help in recalling the qualities found in Buddha. People who look after their wives and children, servants, lands, shelter, gold and silver etc., attach themselves to many things and keep on going after them. Their whole life is devoted to obtaining these things more and more. They are never satisfied. Suttas encourage people first to have the life experience of gahatthapurisa and then to become a member of pabbajita society at an early age and lead successful life of recluse.

In teaching the lay follower, Buddha showed egalitarianism by teaching the rich and the poor, the fallen and the accepted man alike. It is to be noted that, as he understood the life of lay society well, he never discouraged acquisition of wealth but instead warned against acquiring it or squandering it unlawfully. His counsel to Anathapindika, also a wise man, was (1) acquire wealth lawfully, (2)
be certain that one’s kin acquire it lawfully and (3) live to a great age. Attached to these three are four important conditions, as follows:

1. faith
2. virtue
3. liberality or generosity
4. wisdom

Faith refers to belief and acknowledgement of the Tathagata, a name for Buddha. Virtue refers to the five lay precepts against killing, theft, false speech, impure conduct and intoxication. Killing and stealing are essentially crimes. They result in loss to the doer, his kin and his society. They also deplete his resources. Lying and false speech affect one’s social relationships by creating doubt, fear and suspicion. Addiction to intoxicants causes one to lose his senses and act improperly. It induces quarrelling, weakens the body and mind against disease, causes one to lose his character and reputation, causes indecent exposure and impairs his intellect. Henceforth, they are incumbent in the above requirements. Buddha advised that a proper religion teaches the householder proper conduct and guards against the dissipation of his wealth. Principle causes of that dissipation are intoxication, frequenting public fairs, gambling, keeping evil companions and idleness.

Frequenting streets at late hours of the day causes one and his family to lose protection (from evil doers), risks the loss or damage of property, casts suspicion upon the frequenter, induces rumors and false reports, and the frequenter may meet with unexpected problems. Gambling has the following effects: the winner meets with the envy of others, the loser loses his wealth and regrets it; his resources are wasted in the gamble, the court rejects his testimony, his friends and relatives shun him and no woman will agree to marry him. Evil companions are simply those men with same habits and who will lead the frequenter above mentioned into ruin through indulgence in those habits.

Before we discuss about Buddha’s social equality, which predated modern ideas on the issue by several thousand years, we should herein emphasize that the
Caste system as devised by the Brahmanical society consisted of four social classes called *Varnas*. These were the Brahmans, *Kshatriyas* (rulers), *Vaishyas* (workers) and *Sudras* (the lowest class). The *Sudras* were alienated and received the lowest and ‘dead-end’ work in society. The following definition of varna and *jati* should prove enlightening:

“A caste system is one which divides people into a hierarchy based upon heredity. Some believe that the caste system was originally based upon color lines between the conquering Aryans and the darker, native Dravidians. In Sanskrit, the term *varna*, or caste, means color. The higher castes, Brahmans and Kshatriyas, were composed of Aryans whereas the Vaishyas and Sudras were composed of native peoples.

The term caste is Portuguese in origin and, in India, each caste is divided into a number of *jati*, according to which a person's social and spiritual status is established at birth. The members of the same caste are supposed to have equal rank and basically the same profession or occupation. They are not allowed to eat or intermarry with those not of their own caste.

The original four castes in India are the *Brahmin*, or religious order; the *Kshatriyas*, or soldiers and secular rulers; the *Vaishyas*, or farmers and merchants; and the *Sudras*, or laborers and mechanics. People with no caste are pariahs, or outcastes and numerous mixed castes have developed over time.” (*Caste*, citation 2009)

Buddha demonstrated broadmindedness by accepting many Sudras into the Sangha, since they were basically identical to the resident bhikkus. Scanty documentary evidence exists today to identify the Sudras, who may have been aboriginal tribes living there when the Aryans arrived.

Buddha rejected Casteism as conceived by his contemporaries because he knew, definitely, that a man is not a member of a social order by birth, even as no man is born into a criminal career or a social outcaste. Even today, no true court anywhere can deem a man ‘criminal’ from birth and centuries after Buddha so established, French Philosopher Henri Rousseau declared that Man was innocent
at birth and became corrupted by society. Buddha defined a criminal by habit. Stealing from need was forgiven as deprivation from poverty against which he warned the rulers of various kingdoms. Habitual stealing or theft marked a man as a thief. So as much for the varnas of Buddha’s lifetime. Buddha declared that a man belongs to any varna by expediency alone.

Because Buddha rejected the Brahmanical attitude that men were born into varnas and that the Brahmans were the highest class, he conceived rightly that social position was an acquisition from expediency. Buddha was an egalitarian by his observations of society and taught both the bhikkus and lay followers to respect each other despite their backgrounds. One or two of his Sudra bhikkus were later exalted for their accomplishments. To Buddha, everyone was equal, even between the sexes, as he later accepted bhikkunis. One bhikkuni, Vajira attained enlightenment.

So we may conclude that social order, according to Buddhism originates from expediency and nobody is born into any particular position. The social order, prescribed by Buddhism was democratic or republican in form: all members were equal to and in concord with each other.

Sources of Indian Tradition (1959) gives a precise passage from two sources of Buddhist literature on the issue of egalitarianism in Buddha’s lifetime. The first is Sutta Nipata, verse 136, which provides a short verse on birth and social position:

No Brahman is such by birth.
No outcaste is such by birth.
An outcaste is such by his deeds.
A Brahman is such by his deeds.

The second is from the Majjhima Nikaya, wherein Gautama Buddha debated the Brahmans’ claim to social superiority. It concludes with all men entering the same state at death. (Barzun et al)
The teacher Mahadeva, a native of Mathura, who is said to have been the founder of the Mahasamghika schism around 320 BCE remarked in overtones which echoed the Buddhist dharma:

“A man whether he is a Brahman, a Kshatriya, Vaishya or Sudra is such by nature. By evil deeds a twice-born man falls from his position. The Kshatritya or Vaishya who lives in the conditions of a Brāhmaṇa by practicing the duties of one, attains to Brāhmaṇhood. And the foolish Brāhmaṇa, who having attained Brāhmaṇhood which is so hard to get, follows the professions of a Vaisya under the influence of cupidity and delusion, falls into the condition of a Vaisya.’ (R.C.Majumdar). Finally, Majumdar pointed out in his reports that inter-caste marriage was popular. In the midst of it, the Brāhmaṇas insisted on marriage within their caste, whereas the Buddhists and Jainas prescribed that the real was possible. (R.C.Majumdar).